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# WILDERNESS

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*Patrick C. Allen*

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A story that reflects upon a the wisdom gained from a personal diary that was received by my grandparent from an old and dying man named Seth Allen. He offered it to an elder with the agreement that it would be published being titled *Wilderness* nothing else. Happily he enjoyed his last few years living above a brothel and salon at the passing of the nineteenth century. Now one of Denver's historic and remodeled old streets named Larimer Square. A brawl in a back alley is what brought his death where he passed away while being held in the loving arms of a compassionate young Chinese girl. A beautiful prostitute and her name was Choe. The details of this story have been kept secret until current times and have only been published because the author of this book feels that the end times are coming soon for everyone, perhaps even today.

*If a human being passes through the years of one's life not being proud for what he has done in it, then it should be questioned for whom did he live?*

## WILDERNESS

1861 A.D. It was somewhat cooler now after a long run for the mordant man as he crouched underneath the needle-filled branches of the old gangling pine tree that provided some adornment above his hot sweating frame. The sweltering flats of the open prairie could scorch a man back to his basic elements and ash him in only a few weeks, even a man like Vernon. In full posture he could stretch out to about six foot four inches, his long brown mane covering the upper half of his husky frame. He watched all alone as a far away dust bowl turned into an approaching wagon coming his way.

Vernon in the few past years had been very good at avoiding the strangers that were always coming west thereby encroaching upon his hideouts. Usually the invaders showed themselves to be self possessed with foolish pride for whom they thought they might be or about to become as they rode above him in their steel framed wooden panel wagons. They were the settlers. Coming from the east to conquer the new world the west or bust. He didn't trust their kind, not even one of them.

Sometimes he enjoyed their kind as company but they weren't always in the living category either, because they were all dead or going to be shortly. Many of their kind had been buried by hands more kind than his own. His dead friends were very good listeners while residing underground beneath many tall yellow grasses that obscured many other old grave sites scattered about, but existing there too. Dust often rose up from the heaped piles of sun baked rock that was once gathered there by someone's tearful kinfolk. A wooden stick cross often was planted and left behind to indicate that their departed was buried there with a last mission on earth only to entice some hungry earth worms to gather for a feast.

For those left alive well life was often very challenging for them, to say the least. Surviving amongst rattle snakes and killers naturally entitled to many talents made it a fight just to stay alive. The self righteous bible beaters and the kinfolk of the recently dead would often elect just to say a short prayer for the deceased and then would be gone to carry on with their lives, fighting against the ever changing winds of time to survive.

Later on in the night a spy lurking about in the shadows could easily have vision through the canvas wagon coverings. A light from the burning lanterns inside the wagons would cast an image to reveal the greedy one's still clinging to their material possessions. Such things easily defined their flight towards the Rockies. Picture books were often a popular possession filled full of photos and captions that had given them dreams to travel to this place. Many miles away from a safe and moral place. The literature filled with many images of golden shiny rocks, nuggets and shiny gangue material that had been found perhaps beneath the swift currents of the crystal waters belonging to the South Platte river or else where. The eastern towns sizzled with red hot rumors of discovered gold found in California and along the

South Platte river. Surely It's financial yield was beyond measure everyone figured. In taverns and bars unthinkable curiosities developed inside of drunkards minds everywhere. The disease of greed spread like wildfire to be rich and kindled a poor man's invasion into the west where fathers of families dreamt of a gaining a better life somehow. Ready and willing hordes of them became prepared to travel into the far west. If they could only make it with their covered wagons across the hardships that awaited them. Many dreams to drench perhaps to many and fools gold would eventually fill many leather pouches, yet there were a few hungry men that otherwise gather well.

Most gold seekers knew of chemistry only of nuggets and flakes. A rare few actually learned the art of separating gold, or silver from the other base metals requiring a chemistry background because it is stinky and above all things it is extremely dangerous as well. Cyanide can kill someone even in a campsite quite a ways down wind and Vernon was well aware of this detail. He'd seen three men die already because of a false concoction put in the creek on one rainy day last July causing treachery amongst an already pitiful disaster.

Vernon a very well educated reader of scientific journals was a rarity indeed for these parts of the wild. He was a displaced healthy middle-aged easterner, usually hungry and very wildly dwelling in the wilderness of the old west, Oh yes! A cannibal, no doubt that he was! He had come to this level through circumstance and much more along the way. In contrast, once he was a Puritan bible-waiving city slicker, a townier of sort, not a cave man, nor a cannibal. His bad luck spiraled to this day from one very complicated moment some years ago.

Big Horn Ford caught him holding a full house poker hand which made two of them at the wrong gaming table he shot Big Horn with a pistol, killing him dead. He got away after shooting the place up and torching the whole building with a room lantern at last escaping through a broken upstairs window. Another great escape he'd figured until getting caught later on that same day at a local brothel, drunk and in the arms of a girl named Sue Hoe.

Immediately a new hanging galley was finally finished after the first few days and rumors raised the town preceding the trial. The hanging judge Ray Sonny High was called on by the mayor Finch and he finally showed up with his Chinese wife on the stage.

No long trial for Vernon by Sonny High it lasted only a single hour disappointing the whole town. He was sentenced to 120 years of hard labor with no option for parole or even good time all for killing of a local bankers son. Good behavior gave him the only option it meant the whip or it was often called the "The Southern Whip" a forty man team of very tired, angry criminal prisoners that literally hated swamp country and the leeches that

always fed upon them there.

One day the leader of the sadistic guard squad called the goons was having lunch with a very non- innocent local girl named Tina, she was quite young and beautiful with very luring eyes. He was also not without a promiscuous nature but possessed very little good sense because under a southern willow tree Vernon and a man named Bart managed to re-emerge from under the water beheading him with some strips of bark taken from a tall forest oak tree. His head was lifted and thrown into the midst of the criminals and the whole place violently erupted.

Soon afterwards yet painfully later, the two mens attention returned back to the beauty possessed by the tremendously unfortunate sweet, sweet little Tina where she was often times raped and severely beaten within the marshy water land. The men of the "The Whip" rebelled against the guards, quickly killing two more prison guards before capturing all the rest of them keeping each man inside a tight brutish circle of snarling men where terror lingered for them. Their lives were spared only temporarily as a mock trial quickly ensued. Drowning and stick beating came to all of them in an alphabetical sequence carried out by all of the whip.

Once freed and on the lamb the hellish prison chain gang finally dispersed into all and every direction leaving only a few other rival inmates still fighting each other Vernon also headed far, far west, where he never stopped traveling until eventually he made it to the Colorado highlands. Narrowly surviving that ordeal he was brought to crossing the vast western frontier where many other more gruesome levels of survival came along testing his hunting skills.

Finding himself vested deep into the vast wilderness territories of Colorado. Lacking gun powder, supplies and other necessities of basic life dire consequences and danger were always at hand. For instance a simple failure with a stick trap or mock hunting with a broken spear perhaps could put him into a state of virtual starvation and then death or maybe even bringing him into cannibalism.

Vernons compadre, Bart suffered little from his stab wound and he rapidly died one cold winter's day in December. Stomach pains had brought on the murder from Vernon as he was tired and lacking of meat, and it wasn't long just hours before hunger led him to become a human flesh hunter. No blood, no bodies, just friends! Absurd. Being social was a dirty little chore for him, one he'd decided not to practice in if he could get around it. Preferring a good kill and then a meal than idly talking with most people, no socialism with people or folks that had simply become a food source.

"Maybe it was hatred?" Sometimes he'd wonder very truly. Lacking much wisdom he might have gained from his life by practical experience ironically he was much more curious than smart.

The crisp echoing sound of many horse's hooves being hammered onto the hardened dirt of the dryland carried into his ears, coming on from the only remnant artery still visible after last night's rains had dissolved the lighter trails. Breathing more heavily as the omen progressed towards his hideaway, sweat began pouring out of his body and dripping from his forehead until finally it fell onto the dried yellow soil under his untired bare feet.

Oncoming was only a small party of forlorn women settlers, one wagoner steering two worn out ponies that were pulling in unison the clique from the openness of the prairie heading towards a heavily treed forest grove. The wagon carried water barrels strapped steadfast along both of its sides with the interior stocked full of goods and supplies leaning every inch with the driver as he moved around pulling to and fro against the leather reins, dodging every dip in the dirt trail as best that he could arrange. The wooden sheathing that made up the carriage popped and creaked as it stood against the unsteady weight that it possessed and held inward during the dusty ride.

"A tired pony can be spotted very easily from an expert's eye by noticing the slowness in his gait. Sometimes he may even stumble or half step. It's hard to explain," Ermon thought in solitaire before he began slowly moving closer towards the glen, hiding behind some creek thickets packed full of katydids and other crickets. He was an accomplished stealth and very good at hiding away as he studied the terrain, looking for blending features that might suit his colors in order to hide in with the trees and ever-present dried weed brush. Only shadows from his long brush ape body cast dark shadows onto the almost green naked grasses as he moved around watching and listening for signs of trailing wagons that might come from behind the first but there were no other stragglers coming along.

By sneaking along a shadowy tree line against their route he was able to gain some advantage where he could freely notice and look out onto the busy folk as they headed for a well known camp arena. His nest of curiosity attracted him ever nearer to the settlers campsite, yet still bewildered. Waiting in silence he listened to the field for the sounds of the ponies hooves being slammed down onto the surface of the old creek bed, finally sounds erupted yet somehow they were dampened by the clay paddy cracks that had survived the seasonal rains over a period of ten or more years.

Vernon could hear the speech craft of many scandalous women talking inside the cloth covered wagon as it drew ever nearer and then eventually stopped inside an often unoccupied campsite. The carry tale rhetoric of the women folk only parted his scope of concentration for only just a brief moment, he then swiftly withdrew to study in the process of killing the other men.

Lightning trespassed the skies westerly through some purple colored clouds where the sun had been hiding and a cool breeze poured over the flatness of the prairie causing the voices of the women to calm, giving a great ease to the once disrupted air. A rabbit charged into the browned grasses that had long survived the dryness, cast onto the countryside. Only a pony stirred as he very carefully crept inside the invisible fortress within hearing range of their words, lurking not too far off, yet close enough for his nose to gather up the scents from the women's perfumes. Vernon loved the erotic mixture of perfume smell coming from the hive of females exciting him to an extra degree.

The wood scavenging party dressed a fire later to bring the sweet smell of pork fat simmering under a side of beef frying from inside of a steel pan. The smell of it cast into the air by the flame weakened him evermore as hunger pains burned into his ribs. Patience was not his greatest virtue as he'd become quite eager just to meet one of the women against his better thinking. He fought against this urge with fear and managed to keep silent, still lingering in the tall grasses undetected while watching the scene. To approach the wagon any closer would be very risky and perhaps it would even be a suicidal maneuver.

"No, I can't go in yet, trouble could be at hand," He thought because there was some shamelessness he felt already about the man.

History had taught him that grave trouble often can erupt soon after a walking in on somebody no matter what the conditions as folks don't like unwary surprises in such a way. It was in the minds of almost every pilgrim of the day that a single wayfarer could and usually did mean trouble for them. Solitaire cowboys were normally a very brassy breed. If you want trouble then let a complete stranger come in for a cup of pan coffee most of them thought. He'd heard it spoken many times repeatedly while listening on to many of the fireside chats. Killings and gun fights had been known to occur over a simple cup of coffee and an open invitation to set down and talk somehow always led to more than an innocent chat with a stranger. Lead, gun powder, and billy clubs were the only real law out in these parts where ambushes often happened to people.

Yet Vernon had no such intention at this time. Most pioneers were set with fear very early on even from before the time when they had left out of the east the product of rumors filled their minds. Many famous outlaws and even certain frontiersman were simply cold blooded killers truly animal like but unfortunately this rhetoric was carried over to the lonesome cowboy of the old west. No matter what the situation Ermon kept a close eye on the weary group as evening began to fall down upon them. Vernon was truly a living bad man, a cruel human, and killer beast. He'd long since made a bargain with death and his pathological cycles that called for him to devour and then eat the flesh of innocent human beings. Yet it made him very

unique a man very torn between love and hate. A bitter calling to say the least as he has destroyed many innocent families throughout the passing of his many years. Much like the darkness that reigned within his mind he'd finally grown to except it all. Seldom over the decades but even then not very often a spark of humanity might flare inside of him and he might look for ways to explain the gruesome curse that has molded him over the long years.

Being a brute was only part of the dark side to his personal reality not much excited him except death and women. Being a very disturbed person most of the time Vernon was forced to avoid contact with others, yet he was still fascinated by beautiful females and he longed for the feeling that one can receive by having some social contact with them, even dead ones. Recently by his own choosing he elected a solitary style of living but an emptiness eventually arose inside of his being and it was something that continually devoured away at him from deep down inside.

Vernon never tried to deny that he was a blood thirsty psycho to anyone or that he had a severe night hunting affliction especially during the full moon cycles when he couldn't sleep. Yet during the daylight hours he was seemingly a normal man with every passion intact and even though he tried to abandon his primitive desire to have beautiful women in his life, yet some things are not always possible. He had always possessed an insatiable lust for the young females of all the small villages and tribes of Indians in his past years and experiences but to the date he had never found one woman in which to truly love.

At the women's first arrival he'd almost lost all of his self control and holding back was hard for him to do. He further listened to them talk inside of the wagon's shell as it plodded forwards towards a nearby camp ground that other's had previously used.. His nerves were on edge and it could have been the delicate and soft voices of the female's coming from inside the wagon shell that excited him or perhaps it was the sweet smell of musk perfume that carried upon a mellow breeze but the moment was strong enough for him to spark a memory hidden deep from inside of his troubled mind. He had unusual abilities he was a special kind of the human form and he had sensed the oncoming of the females long before the wagon had ever come to within sight distance and he also knew that there were three female of young women hood under the tarpaulin covered shell.

Cannibals have a powerful mating instinct that leads them on and on to forever seek out a special mate that usually they never ever find. To say the least there had been many innocent women devoured in the almost endless search to find the right one and yet it is a passion that only gets stronger for them over their life term.

A powerful sexual desire boiled within him for the immediate companionship of one or perhaps all three of them. Yet he knew that in

only two days time that the moon would be shining full again and he might kill them all. "Yes!" He quietly growled to himself, "I shall do it again" and he knew that more than likely it that he would.

Pretty soon the group of travelers stopped for the evening, "Whoa!" The driver with the reins yelled out to the team.

"Captain! What are we stopping for?" One of the ladies asked in a smart tone. "Is it already sundown" She asked. Her voice from within the wagon easily carried through the canvas fabric and reached the driver.

"Whoa!" The Captain commanded again to the team but never stopped humming a short tune out loud with his deep voice all the while. He stopped to reply back to the inquiry from inside the covered wagon but gave it up and twisted his face out of anguish. He finally tied the reins to the buck board after the team came to a stand still, they shuffled inside their harnesses and whinnied mildly nervous, yet ready for a rest. As the evening grew on they would be allowed to feed upon the green grasses that crawled from the darkened banks of the white dry creek bed.

The Captain was a big burly sort of man and also a slaver, he was made by god to be a natural born laborer of the earth with very broad shoulders and thick bones. His big hands could grasp another man's neck and break it easily if he had a good reason to do such a thing. God had made him to work with his muscles very easily.

He and the rest of the party were all "salt of the earth kind". They had all come to be traveling settler's simply because they were dreamer's and needed a fair shake at any opportunity that arose. A fair shake was very hard to find back from where they had all come from and a person need not be literate to listen to the fantasies and tales of the rich far western frontier. At the time it seemed that words of prosperity were carried on almost every eastern tongue and coupled with a sense of extreme moral authority further motivation to head west was no longer needed and new homesteading became an adventure all of it's own. Witch hunting was still common place in certain parts of the eastern territories like Salem and others and new beliefs and concepts were still emerging from the old evil ways. Old habits were slow to change in the people especially then.

Vernon was very cautious as he slowly crept down over to the creek's embankment and then finally into the moist interior of the nearby water spill where he found plenty of camouflage amongst a batch of tall katydid's and other thickets and once in a perfect spot he settled his body onto an old petrified aspen tree that yielded a perfect vantage point. He could still look out and see the company of women and the one man that pilfered into one of the women's bags up beyond a moderate incline of earth that normally made for a fire pit. On this night he was very content just to study the crowd from a distant place in full view.

"Oh! you wretched witch," The bigoted Captain said to the younger

blond haired girl in the party. "Where's my bottle at?" he further insisted to question her. She was the meek sort, and backed away from him as if she knew nothing. It was pretty obvious for Vernon to see that the man was bullying her for some special attention later on and he figured that the young girl was probably still a virgin. "Look!" The rough man said to her crudely, "I'll sell you virgin or dirty either way your still worth five hundred dollars to me." The young girl backed away even farther from the brute yet he still approached her even closer. She was shaking and trembling from fear but not a whimper came from her lips. "Go make my tent up and neatly spread the bed roll out be gone with yourself! You hear me?" He spoke to her sadistically as he unknowingly pointed towards the thickets where Vernon was secretly hiding out. Your daddy wont help you now little girl he taunted her as she went away crying towards the misted marsh. The man returned over to where the other women were at. You witches want to get there early? he asked of them. "I mean I can take my sweet time, don't you know?"

"Yeah! Your taking us to the dens aren't you, the pleasure dens." One of the slightly older ladies was compelled to inquire of him.

"People die very early in those places because of the diseases."

Another one of them said.

"Yeah! your trash anyway, what's the difference from where I stole you from? I mean were all were working inside of a brothel except the girl" He snickered as he sounded the young girls name to them.

"You're the trash" as the last of the women that had been standing by interjected but suddenly the man rubbed his revolver and showed it clearly to the angry bunch of women that he was sensing that an attack to be coming on shortly. They backed off only after seeing his gestures and didn't crowd him anymore.

The man was called the Captain for a reason and he had a bad reputation for being extremely brutal to his slave women. Many of the slave girls showed up at the sex camps missing a finger or part of an ear. He was rudely known to take a slaves finger's off with a single shot but actually nothing was beyond his boundaries ever. Out in the wilds no one lived to tell revealing stories anyway!

"You witches be good I'm going to bed" He said to them and then left.

The stars burned holes into the dark sky on this night of an August torment for the youngest of the slave girls as he lived up to his name as being a rapist as well. The girl had found a hiding place in a cave nearby but it was full of old bear hair and bat dung that hung from the top of the rounded ceiling and dripped stench onto the cave floor. She mistakenly thought that she had evaded the eyes of slaver Nick, while he bickered with the other women however his eyes were following her very closely all along and a sinister breeze crept into the darkened area as he crept up to the cave

where she was hiding at.

At the entrance of the cave Nick slowly appeared by gathering his height at the threshold and showing his darkened figure to the girl that swallowed up all of the star light from the heavens. It was Nick and he spoke to the hiding figure of the frightened young slave girl that he could not clearly see. "Daddy! came to see you tonight." He said with his grumbled voice that was even fouler than the stinking bat dung that clung to her skinny legs. She stood up on her feet and kicked some dirt towards the large man that probably had a deadly intention in his mind for her as well and she backed even further into the rock chamber her fear smartly overcame her until there was no more room to run.

"Your not going to let me live are you? she asked him.

"Daddy must keep some secrets your know little girl, but maybe if you do what I want you to do." He told her as if she were to understand his thinking.

"Now take your clothes off so your new daddy don't have to rip them off of you, I would hate to have to tear them up you know."

"No!" She screamed I wont do it. "Ahh!" She screamed again and again but no one came to immediately rescue her. The sound of the young girl screaming excited the slaver ever more and he suddenly leaped at her. Soon he had her on the cave floor where he was tearing away at her Cinderella style clothing and all of his tremendous weight had her pinned down. His wheezing lungs had to breath deeply during his excitement and he stopped his aggression towards her for a short while long enough to get his breath when there became a sound at the entrance of the cave. It disturbed him that someone might interrupt his personal festivities and his blood flowed red hot for the intruder as he rose to his feet.

"Your going to get some real treatment who ever you are." He screamed at the top of his half shattered voice while he rushed to the edge of the cavern all the while over looking a figure that lingered inside a shadow nearby.

"Thunk!" Was the sound as the dirty slavers head hit the rock bottom and then all of him further rolled down the incline to where the other women were staying at. The rest of his torso dropped like a bag of beans and dripped red blood jelly everywhere.

Later one of the slaves yelled loudly, which brought the Captain back to consciousness and then he rose up to his feet from his fright.

"I hear them dirty dogs coming from the ranch." She said sharply.

From afar vociferous sounds was detected by the party of distraught women suggesting an uproar amongst other rogue travelers. Possibly thieves slovenly communicating amongst themselves carried quickly into the damp night air and was keenly detected by those in camp. On such an evening loud voices might easily travel a mile or even further. All of the

excitement aroused within Vernon a true craving for the taking of another human life. Hunger was beginning to grow intensely deep inside of his stomach and he was rapidly losing his human senses to those of the hungry beast within him. It would be awhile he knew for sure but not too long before the mental change occurred and he might lose control.

There were two other women inside the camp and they were tied with rope to the steel hinge's of a wagon's buck board next to a corralled bunch of mustang ponies that the misfits rode. Unfortunately for the women it looked as though they had been bullied and even raped by the ten cowboy's that recently rode in and were drinking whiskey and arguing amongst themselves.

All of the slaver's who were especially known for their vigilance during the dark hours of a day were now oddly setting around a full blazing campfire listening to their leader speak. The leader came to his feet while completing the yarn of his tale and threw a rock into the blazing fire pit sending light beams shots and red cinders into the tall timber's that stood along the outskirts of the place. The snow kept coming down in larger and thicker flakes until the snow blankets that had formed atop of the stranded pine needle branches started to seep some of the snow particles from the heat of the fire down below. "It's wet out here!" One of the cowboys out spoke the other voices in the crowd.

"Hey! Let's go bang the women." Said the outlaw right next to him.

"Yeah! They must be getting cold by now maybe a good ride will warm them up a little." The first one replied and then headed for the wagon while being followed by the other.

The poor girls were half frozen already and the outlaws that made them captives provided them with no shelter at all. Their hands had been tied very tightly from behind their backs using strand of dried buffalo leather that was only now beginning stretch loose from the moisture that was released into them out of the wet melting snow. A ten foot length of hemp rope was tied around the leather bindings from the rear of them and then finally dead ended up at the buck board of the wagon. The two girls had pulled hard against the rope that was holding them hoping that something might break loose at the buck board but they were unsuccessful, until. Now finally they had a glimmer of hope just as the two rogue cowboys staggered up onto the scene.

"You skimpy women getting excited again?" One of them asked in a very snide way.

"You're a bloody pig!" The English girl boldly stated and this enraged the other derelict slaver and he suddenly went after the bound girl to do her harm.

"I'll show you too keep your mouth shut! He shouted loudly at her just before punching her in the eye with his fist and she then collapsed into the

bloody wet snow wounded and he was upon her.

The other rogue was also a brutal pig and he wasted no time in getting involved with the physical raping of the young girls.

"You witches are fine little love makers," he said while wrestling the poor American girl to the ground and holding her by the hair during the lifting of her skirt. She screamed loudly during the entire ordeal but not a soul listened to them wailing. After amusing themselves with the torture of the two girls the cowboy's returned to the fireside for a short smoke.

"Was your's good?" The taller one asked after exhaling some tobacco smoke up into the air.

"Yeah! I guess!" The other one finally returned.

"Hey what's that over there? Then the taller rogue pointed to something that was lingering out beyond the perimeter of the campsite where the fire light could not quite reach too and everyone present followed the direction of his finger with their eye's and looked on.

"Oh! Just a shadow I suppose." The other assumed.

"What do you mean a shadow?" "The darned thing moved and then disappeared. I seen it go away it was very big!" The rogue said.

"Do you smell that stench?" "It smells like something is dead over there." He spoke even further.

"Yeah! That's absolutely correct there is something huge out there."

One of the other men in the crowd broke into the conversation and stood up from the excitement and drew nearer towards the burning flame. It made the other men nervous and the leader of the group rushed into the center of the bunch pulled his Colt revolver from his holster and then loudly yelled out. "It's the breed, it's the breed " He then fired a round from the small arm's directly into the forest where the huge shadow had moved and everyone scurried around in the camp looking for cover behind something or someone. The place soon became silent except for the rat's that were quickly evacuating the wagon for some reason or another and they were squealing to high heaven as they went away with their tail's pointing straight up from the snow heading somewhere safer than the camp.

A Bald Eagle that had been resting on a high branch of a aspen tree scrutinized the rat's as they scurried on the surface of the white powdery snow but suddenly refused flight after spreading his wings from the excitement preferring to watch the human calamity down below unfold as it may. One of the women squawked as the rat's high tailed it over her almost frozen blouse and she soon silenced as well.

There came a voice from deeper in the forest that broke the suspense and it was a human voice because it spoke words but they were barely lucid. It sounded very vulgar as if the thing that had spoke it was struggling to get the words out properly.

"We have quite a gathering here in my place. So you have come to be

in my hell.” The voice declared as the sound of Vernon’s upper teeth clashed with the teeth of his lower jaw and fit into the message.

Crack! The sound of a 30 caliber bullet exploded into the air and the flying bullet sent a report back to the slavers telling them that the lead had only shattered a wood pile nearby.

“Why do you fear me?” the voice questioned. “I only want two of you tonight,” the voice spoke again.

Finally the tall rogue cowboy spoke up. “What do you want with us? Are you a fool?” he asked.

“Yes! I am a fool for even speaking with you and I am a very hungry fool for the time being so you and that other young cowboy just come on out and get me or I’ll just have to come on in and get you anyway.

“Come on, Butch, let’s go get him!” the tall cowboy directed to the shorter one. Neither one of them had a clue as to the danger that they were in or what they would soon be facing as they scurried low in the snow while crawling on their stomachs and out into the forest.

The eight men left behind suddenly began talking for a minute and chattering to each other and then they suddenly stopped once again and all that they could hear was one of the two slavers yelling as if something was killing him. “Ah! Ah! “Ahh---! Stop! Stop!” the voice yelled and then quickly was silenced. Next came a rifle crack but farther away and the sound of another person running away bolted back to them but from another direction next a moment of silence and then finally nothing more was heard from those two men. Very quickly the moment had become an abysmal sensation for those that remained.

The two girls were both having side splitters. They were screaming out to the others, “Let us go! Let us free you bast----!!!!”

And someone did, probably just to shut them up. They quickly left the scene and away from the killing area and the wicked camp but headed out in a direction towards the sighting of a lantern light that they’d spotted earlier in the evening. The slavers did not much appear to be concerned as the ladies left because they had other concerns on their minds, especially when a head rolled into camp and settled very near the blazing fire. It was the tall cowboy’s head and it had been cut with a razor sharp object from ear to ear but only the flesh. The rest had been pulled apart from his torso and part of the spine was still attached. Then came the other’s head and it rolled very near the first one and after this event took place it was followed with a bitter cold howl and then Vernon spoke to them again. “Mount them “no good head’s” on a couple of fir sticks let them dry and get parched in tomorrow’s sunlight and don’t forget to keep them in your camp always because I wouldn’t want you boy’s getting lonely in there.”

“See you all tomorrow night.” He finished speaking his piece and then went back to eating more of the gruesome looking dead bodies of the two

men. His words had a woefully bad effect upon the other's still surviving that had been merchants of the female flesh slave sex market in the past but were now seriously thinking of becoming hardcore religious leaders.

"The leader spoke to everyone there. "What the hell is he talking about? Mount the heads."

"Shit they were already mounted until he pulled them off!" another's voice shot through the vicinity but no person laughed. Even amidst the humor it was still a very solemn moment for them.

"Do it!" The leader commanded, and most of the men began selecting two long sticks that could be shoved in the snow and used for mounting the head's around the dwindling fireside.

"Hey! Where are the ponies someone yelled and everyone ran over to where they had been corralled up using a lasso.

"There gone," the leader said with a very disturbed inflection inside of his spoken word.

"We'll find them tomorrow, Captain!" one of the sobered slavers opened up having some courage, enough to speak up. The isolation that the crowd was now feeling was beginning to change the equation somewhat and the men were becoming full of fear. The captain was beginning to wonder just what changes were coming on from the men because he had led into this place of true hell so he went back to the fireside once again to think. The captain was a "hell of a man!" He was hard as a diamond gem rock on the outside and on the inside he was like molten lava that would burn someone for no real reason at all "any time and place." The captain was a man that would take you there and then rudely dump you but he commanded some respect always. The elder had seen the remnants of the Spanish American revolutionary war and the changes that all of the people involved had to endure whether good or bad. He was the factor that the outlaws respected and carried on for in life even though their profane sense of unmorality compelled them to do otherwise. No man understood what drove the Captain, no man still alive. He was the fire that burned within them even though their inward song had grown to a mere flickering of the life flame, his story had the answers that others needed. Wisdom was his power, none other. He was all that they had in life.

There was something else within the minds of the outlaws that was growing stronger and it was something that they feared dreadfully because it was a vision of their very own mortality. "Look at your pathetic self!" They were all thinking and it was true!

The wind had to carry it to them! The smell of something so rude, it was so abrupt to a normal human being, there was a stanch that filled their noses. "The two cowboys that were killed tonight what should we do for them? One of the other men spoke to the captain.

"There probably isn't much of them left I reckon! Only parts." He replied.

“Are you going to see into it?” “I mean over there where they are lying out dead.” The captain asked of him.

“No! No!” The coward quickly returned back.

Another from the bunch broke in saying. “I think that thing, whatever it was will not return tomorrow.”

“Lies, lies!” Said the Captain to the eight of them “killing all of you would be an act of mercy no less. That thing as you call it is a werewolf surely it will return tomorrow night, and it will come for us all until we are no more.” “Haven’t you heard other’s talk about it?”

“Oh! But now you believe.” There was a long moment of silence amongst the group until finally the silence broke. “It’s getting cold and I’m going to try to get some sleep in my tent.” The captain said as he headed for his pup tent leaving the rest of them cold and confused.

A very cold winter’s breeze howled and had picked up sending everyone scattering towards their own buffalo hide tent as the wind pounded against them. The night winds whispered only on rare occasions but still it quickly meandered up and down through the valley’s and the forested countryside none the less.

Vernon had left the area for now because he knew that if stayed nearby that he would have to kill them all and that was not always his method. Sometimes he preferred to savor the killing with prolonged dread and fear of him. “Something for later.” Popped into his brain. “Oh!... My intense hunger I must preserve them for tomorrow.” He began thinking even further as his human senses were slowly coming back to him now. With his lust for warm blood gratified to a certain degree he’d wondered away from the companies encampment following his instinct to seek out a cave.

It wasn’t much of place to call it a home but a stone cave means shelter even for a flesh eater that was now sprawled out in the snow but lying at the entrance way grappling away at his chin like he was dying from the pains of having a bone stuck in his throat. Ooh! He moaned again and again until finally a man appeared in the threshold.

Unlike his cabin this cave was his second home but a place very different from his warm cabin. Here in this place he collected heads and they were featured as stick heads along with other skeletal remains scattered about. He was very familiar with all of it’s features and could even recall some of their names, young and old alike. A sniffing coyote awoke him from his trance and he shied it away to the forest where it quickly disappeared into the trees. A crow was flying over head and cawing as it had to view the piles of bat dung that clung to the sides of the rocky mouth to his hidden portal. Rat’s had left evidence from many years of their presence throughout the caves interior some of them even lay out on the snow dead. Their dark corpses gathering heat from the rising sun that was coming up from the east. Vernon was now a man but only until the moon

returned again for him later. Sometimes he felt a detestation for the moon cycles and what was brought onto others by him because of them even though he was changed during the hours of the night at times he had some remorse for it all. Otherwise he'd lived for centuries because of the affliction which also had given him special powers to live on and on longer than any man could ever be alive. Vernon was a special kind of killer because he was borne with the condition just like his brother Zeb.

Voil senior was a German immigrant that had taken a wife. He found her living in the American colonies back east. Both he and his Dutch blooded wife settled together in the cabin where they raised two sons. Neither child was made aware of their oncoming sickness until later in their teen years. The changeling disease grew ever stronger with the years as it grew inside the both of them slowly at first but with symptoms until one day their father had to explained to them a tragic tale. One that could not be changed. Killing other humans was to be in their blood forever more. He spoke to them of the eating of the dead principal which they knew nothing of, because neither boy had ever killed another human before.

"The living dead are inside your mind they are not real." Vernon could hear the voice of his father speaking in a day dream as he milled around the area now inspecting his heads and counting them all. He had eighty nine posted and was going to make ninety nine if he had his way. Soon the counting was over and he went inside of the cave to rest for the entire day. A bed of grasses and dried flowers lay under his body as the sun moved across the southern sky until it began falling into the western horizon.

"Ah! Dusk" he verbalized to the walls of the damp cave dwelling as reality once again came to him and his eyes opened ever wider to the fading light of the sun and also to a voice that he recognized was approaching the cave from the outside. It was the ole pole skinner coming around but late and he wondered why as he rose to his feet and went to the entrance.

"I thought I'd find you here!" The old frontiersman said as if he were greeting an old friend yet from a distance away. "How's your collection coming along son any new poles standing yet?" He investigated even further as he finally became nearby, close enough to lower his voice some.

"Where's Betsy?" Vernon was curious and politely asked. Betsy was the old man's befriended mule that had carried the loads of many adventures while trapping in the outback territory for him.

"She's taken ill" the old man said. "I left her at the camp, she gets that way every year during the same months it seems. Maybe it is something in the air." He pondered the idea some while thinking about Vernon's dilemma and finally said. "Listen there is a camp of slaver type hooligans about a half mile down the trail from here and they are really behaving strangely down there. They are posting heads just like you do and they already have two of them mounted on sticks inside their camp as we speak.

Hah! Hah! I didn't figure you had anything to do with that. I mean the posting of the heads." It was odd but the old man cared about Vernon where most other people would never consider the idea of befriending a killer like him and besides the trapper had only seen the evidence where Vernon had killed strictly outlaws. Usually his victims were the slaver type of individuals.

"Evening is coming on old man! And you know that the forest can consume someone very quickly under the light of a full moon. Don't you think that you'd ought to be going somewhere safe?" Vernon asked of him.

"Yeah! I think your absolutely correct. He said and then he started to leave while carrying his fur cache draped over his shoulder. "Good hunting my young friend." The old man spoke from a longer distance away until finally he vanished from Vernon's eye sight as the darkness from the timber shadows swallowed the form of his moving silhouette. Vernon sniffed at the old man's scent because his killing symptoms were already beginning to come on to him. He strongly charged into his mind a message to the beast within him that he hoped would listen to his pleading, "Don't kill... Please don't kill the old man." He thought again to himself even though he knew that he had little control. But he knew if the old man did not quickly put some miles down that his head would also be on a pole stick like the other's.

The trail that the elder had spoken of was a game trail that many creatures of the night had followed over hundreds of years and was now beginning to show signs of life as a bear crossed through the tree line. He growled as he slowly went away from the beaten path and then meandered around the cave dwelling clearing perhaps seeking out a honey hive that was thriving in a nearby Aspen tree grove. From the cave Vernon studied the sounds of the beast from afar that was grunting away at him with sounds that were surely threats and their meaning was for him to stay away lest he receive damage or perhaps death. He also could hear the voices of the fools down below that had fortified their area for another killing. Of the eight men still living he would gather two maybe three heads tonight.

They had all banded together over time. It could have been finances or the just simply the captains guidance that brought them to this place. Of the eight men none of them could read or write excepting the captain who was extremely intelligent and worldly in almost every way. He had the taste of time from the years and he was wise enough to figure out that he and his team were in for some trouble tonight.

The snow fall from the previous day had become slightly hardened from the cold wind that sometimes moved over it and now a man walking could be heard early on quick enough to provide a warning to someone that might be listening to it. He'd studied the terrain during the hours of the day and had also viewed the entrails from the men that were no longer alive. The guts of the men had been spread out into flat piles and then spread out even

further to reveal their secrets. Something bothered him about it all as if to no end until he finally found an answer for himself as to why their intestines had been pilfered in such a way. It seemed that what ever had torn them into pieces also had performed an entrails reading of some sort before leaving their tripe abandoned in the blood stained snow. Certain Indian tribes had been know to practice such things but only on animals and during special ceremonies and regardless this man creature was not an Indian of any sort.

Supper had been cooked from inside a large metal pan that was later cleaned using a handful of crushed granite that was found underneath the snow and the smell of burnt venison remained in the air. It was almost sweet smelling and not a bit of it was wasted by the hungry men. The chef that was cleaning up was a black man that had escaped from the south a few years past and now he claimed to be a free man but that vision was a very hard thing to instill within the other's of the group. A far reality indeed. His personal anger was with the white man especially against the southern breed for killing his wife and child before escaping the plantations in South Carolina. White slavery was his way of getting back too even the score somehow with society. Besides the captain had saved his neck by shooting a hangmen's rope from around his neck a few years ago and with the captain he had a place to be.

"What are you doing to my plate?" He asked a nearby straggler that was still hungry for more supper and was licking the gravy from the large saucer. "Can't you go somewhere, supper is finished cowboy!" He declared.

"Ah! Come on chef there's more." "Why don't you sneak me some more grub?" The straggler continued talking.

"The Captain will kill me you fool." The chef rudely responded back and then carried on with more conversation. "I see a star on your forehead tonight, it is almost like a body carving was once there.

Maybe you should stay in close by the fire tonight, in the light from it where you can be watched."

"Your just spooked tonight, your seeing things that aren't really there." The angered white man with the star on his forehead growled and then decided to leave the place of where supper once was served to him. The chef continued on with his cleaning chores but sent a message to the retreating man saying something loud enough to where others could hear as well.

"Dirty slave dog go on back to your pit. If we don't get some fresh meat in here were all going to be eating entrails for supper." Someone hiding behind the wagon replied in a loud voice.

"I thought we already were!" There was a quietness that came over the group as everyone began to wonder about their fate and what was going to

happen to them, perhaps very soon.

A sinister kind of man howling broke into the region filling everyone in the camp with terror and suddenly the chef grabbed his spoons and headed for his own personal spot in the clearing over by the supply wagon. The sound of the clattering metal from the silverware vibrated the air all around him until finally he dove into a hole somewhere around the wagon's rear wheel. Rat's began vacating the covered buggy once again and scurried from the buck board section of it only to become projectiles that dove into the air away from it and onto the hardened snow below.

"There goes tomorrow's dinner." The chef said to the hungry cowboy that was watching the scene as well.

"Shut up! Your going to get us killed!" He quietly replied.

Ka boom! Off went a lead ball projectile from the barrel of a Kentucky Long Rifle into the darkened forest region having no effect on anything except a dirt clod that was scattered into a million or more pieces. "Then the Captain yelled out, Reload and hold your fire." Then he had to ask the young shooter, "What are you firing at a dirt clod for? No reply came from the young slaver.

Vernon was playing the men by throwing a rock just outside the camps perimeter maybe someone would be lured into shooting their rifle thereby revealing a muzzle blast to him and it worked very well.

Someone was beating on a tin can over towards the wagon and for this he could not figure what the reason for maybe it was a wind caused sound. "Listen!" The Captain yelled out, "shut that dammed sound up now!" And it quickly was silenced by someone.

The Captain had found a hole over by the fire that he had reckoned was his for the taking and he had piled into it when the commotion had first started. And now he leaned against the ground wall of it as if the moist dirt that soiled his pants did not bother him at all. Something was out there indeed, and it wasn't speaking to anyone this time. Everyone knew that Vernon had came back for them and the Captain especially understood that he could not ever stop him from killing them all it was inevitable. He knew that if he were to stay alive that he must do something very unusual and against his nature. He figured Vernon might make a mistake by coming inside to kill the other's and that he might be given a chance to run away and maybe there could be hope somehow. Vernon had shown his cards by throwing the rock into the camp and the Captain knew just what to do.

"You men get ready! He yelled out loudly. And then he grabbed a hand full of rocks from the bottom of his hole. The men were ready to shoot at almost anything and he also knew what their positions were precisely. He threw a rock over by Shindies place first. Sure enough! Off went a Ka boom. "Reload!" The Captain yelled.

Next came Marvin's hideout. The captain threw a rock towards his location

and sure enough the sound of black powder filled the area revealing a muzzle blast. Six more rock's were thrown and everyone took a shot until finally at last it was the Chef's turn and when his rock came from the Captains arm no fire was returned and silence was maintained as he preferred to hold back his muzzle load.

Soon after the last muzzle blast went off a huge pair of eye's appeared very close in from the forest so close that they lingered inside of the last shadow that could exist nearby the flame from the burning fire. The Captain then tossed a handful of black powder into the fire and a spark generated an immediate inferno from the fire pit. Up went the flame as it reached into the sky. It all happened very fast and in rushed Vernon. He moved with little sound at first and then he became more excited the closer he came to the first muzzle blast location as he almost instantly over came the man's location catching him almost fully surprised. Vernon growled as he looked down at the frightened man who was holding his pillow instead of his rifle that he'd dropped from the fear of seeing such a horrible human appear so fast upon him. Instantly Vernon acted to impale death upon his first victim by first grabbing the man's shoulder thereby sinking his razor sharp dagger into the his body but before long he had the man's head inside of his tremendous and powerful arms and quickly he crushed the remainder of his skull between his two hand and then slice every body part that was left hanging from his torso.

The Captain and the other men were watching and were suffering from the rigors of terror even the captain was completely frozen with the horror. He would have fired his weapon but he was afraid that the beast would come after him and for now the creature was following the muzzle blast pattern that the Captain had set out and he hoped that he would continue to follow it. The men were not scattering about none of them daring enough to abandon their hiding places and yet if they'd only known that their hiding place was already known to Vernon and it was going to be their place of death.

The Captain popped his head from his hole and then crawled like a snake away from the camp as his fellow slaver's were being killed behind him. He quickly headed for the darkest corner of the camp as he scurried along in the snow and finally made it into the darkness of the forest where he arose to his feet and ran away into the night. A pattern was set in the fighting because first there would be rifle shot and then someone would yell out louder than his fellow's. Kaboom then Ahh! "They are really getting it back there," he thought to himself as he continued running but his old feet could move so quickly anymore as when he was young and he complained of his legs for not being better. "Oh you tired stumps. You can do better." He went on to say towards them. Soon the rifle shots ended and then it all came down to one last remaining scream from all of the men. His terror told

him that they were all dead except one of them. He had a blindness from his fear and he wanted to give Vermon more sheep to slaughter that would keep him occupied and away from him but he was out of other men to sacrifice. He had even given up his personal chef for the offering. At last he heard the sound of the Vermon's last victim and he figured that the yelling came from the voice of the chef because of the deeper tonality inside the scream. The Chef possessed a very deep sort of voice and it was unmistakable even with a scream. Something very odd was going on back there because the Chef was being made to suffer longer than the rest of the men had too as the Captain further listened on. The chef kept yelling, "Oh Stop! Oh Stop! Please Stop!" Over and over again repeatedly until finally at last there were no more voices that emanated from the camp. There was only the sounds of flesh being torn and eaten as the bone crushing jaws of Vermon fed his stomach with human meat. The Captain was a smart coward and a yellow belly but he continued in running away from the scene with no fear of what he might find in the brush of the forest. Harder and harder he pushed his tiring old legs against the burning muscles inside of them until finally he ducked into a Fir tree's shadow without slowing down. Bam! He instantly ran into something very large, thick, and dense. His forward momentum was instantly changed and the rebound knocked him backwards and finally he collapsed onto the cold snow. He laid there a minute trying to figure out what had knocked him almost senseless when he heard the rumbling of the pony nearby that he'd impacted. "Oh thank god!" He mumbled and then slowly made to his feet and began speaking to the pony real nice like. "Come here horsy come here, oh! Good fella!"

"Mmm...., mmm." The pony replied nervously and began to stammer about with his hooves. The Captain took a moment to think and then grabbed some old dried up chocolate from his front pocket and held it out towards the horse "Mmm...mmm." The pony murmured again and then came over to him without further hesitation dragging his halter reins along that were still hanging from his head.

"Oh, you little beauty." The Captain announced to the equine as he finished bringing the saddle upright from around the horses belly and upon it's back. Both he and the pony quickly disappeared into the forest depths far and away from the camp where Vermon was still eating his meal and gorging upon the flesh of the dead men.

Day break had crept onto the death camp grounds and had filled the sky with a bright light finding Vermon still there but he was already gorged back and he was still dazed from the fresh human meat that filled his belly and was partially digested by his body and he lay naked in the snow. His body was shivering from the cold of the snow and a spot was melting from his body heat and forming into a mud hole where he lay half frozen in it. He awoke to find the massacre that he'd caused and it was a very ugly sight but

he was conditioned to seeing such things and it did not bother him in the slightest because dead bodies were considered to be a shrine by him.

He finally came to his complete senses and started gathering heads for his collection when he discovered that a single head was missing out of the eight bodies there was only seven heads and that he had been cheated from having all eight of them. This discovery infuriated him and he piled them all into the middle of the camp ground where he gave his heads a short lecture before putting them into a buffalo hide bag and then leaving with the dead heads back towards his cave and into the darkness he traveled.

She had disappeared further into the depths of the cave by then after the captain had been trailing her. A collection of crystalline perched rocks that gouged into the walls is where she chose to hide away with a slight possibility of safety. Though stranded, none the less she might gather a plan down there.

Outside she could hear them, the infidels, and they were all laughing at the captain except for the captive women who were haunted with disdain for him and the other menfolk present.

Only a flickering charge of firelight held her mind from escaping into a state of gruesome terror as the floor of the cave mysteriously began to move around from beneath her feet. She stumbled and suddenly tried instinctively for a hand grip onto a glistening rock that belonged to the wall that it might hold her from falling down into a bottomless pit however it crumbled from her strength. So it seemed that death might take her as she teetered at the edge. She was panicky while still bent over and hanging over a ledge of earth that could disintegrate into a tight worthless rubble mass in seconds under even her meager weight, she felt like screaming for someone's help. It was useless but she still tried.

A hot cloud of steam was building again from down under and soon it arose from the hot pit causing her skirt to be contorted into long strands of cotton bulk revealing her white skin tight panties and soft underside as she rotated her dainty legs freely underneath the ledge to maintain a suitable balance at the edge. The tightened skirt that she wore pulled tight against her cleavage taking the breath away from her as the hot wind gusted ever stronger from below further constricting her gown around her chest.

"Ah! Please someone help me! She uttered in a weak voice but loud enough to be heard over the trapped air that was being used up deep below to feed the flowing lava stream. The under ground lava tube constantly spitting fire from the smoldering earth like red fire waves.

"The steam is burning my hands I can't hold on much longer." she whimpered. The fiery steam also was beginning to turn her hands cherry red showing the intense pain that she was beginning to feel. As the heat rose so did the temperatures around her body and every rock around the mouth of the opening had discolored into a black color and her hands and legs were

becoming over heated from it all. Somehow gathering her inner strength she kept a balance and clung for her dear life as the flowing river of lava down below became ever more eager to consume her flesh.

A naked figure suddenly appeared at the breach of the cave and then mustered itself into motion to get within arms reach over nearby the young girl.

“A man was coming, but would he help her? She nervously thought to herself.”

“Hold on do not lose you grip, or you’ll die. I’ll be there soon.” A voice confided to her. I’m here to help you out.” And then quickly the figure reached down and pulled her out of the smoldering crevice. With weakened legs she immediately fell to the ground and sprawled there to recover while breathing less heavily than before.

She lay there admiring the naked man creature that had also faced death to rescue her.

He was slightly short but a burly sort of man and strong looking but somehow he appeared to be different. Very peculiar too her in other ways. She could not see him clearly but as an image only after he had purposefully backed inside of a flickering shadow to hide for awhile. Regaining possession of his steel sword and a leather pouch he was prepared for the other’s. Gripping his weapons tightly into his hands as he watched her with utmost curiosity.

“You could have died” He said to her while she recovered even more.

Slightly she reopened her beautiful eyes far enough to reveal to him that they were indeed brown, she grimaced only to look at him once again. “An elf like man.” She thought to herself but said nothing of it to him.

“A devil perhaps borne to be nearly perfect with very long silver hair that tumbled with slight curls downward onto his tanned backside. No! Surely not that either.” Carefully she pondered her thoughts even more.

“I’ll take you somewhere safe.” He neatly said to her before offering up his strong hand once again.

“Yes! I’ll go! Thank You.” She graciously replied to him.

She received his hand into her own and then was lifted using his strong arms and she finally could stand on her own with inner strength.

“Come we must hurry and follow the deep winds into the depths of Terra. The cave will allow us a passage down there. Lest they find you here.” He ushered onto her to follow him perhaps deep into the hellish cave. A terrifying idea for her but something else was even more frightening than all of the darkness that was coming their way.

He moved for a short second then stopped a few yards away as he could see that she was also still afraid to follow along with him.

“Come can’t you hear the coyotes at the canyon rim howling out there? That means they are coming in for us. Don’t you know that evil will soon

be here!" He said.

"Come Follow me to safety and I will request the Great Ordomb Shield to light the cave floor for us but we must travel for a short distance before I request it. Otherwise the evil men will follow." He sanctioned to her.

A fear much greater than darkness overcame her and the abyss of the cave soon swallowed both of their forms.

He carried her to the threshold of his mansion that stood against a hill. It had been cleared of foliage by some slaves accustomed to the master's wealth and generosity so long ago. A lurching shadow from a perched gargoyle outlined its dark figure onto the scattered granite rocks stretching a long distance from the front entrance way fascia. It was a log house wonderment especially in these times with long sun cooked thick timber encompassed by narrow mortar joints hiding some dried straw inside its midst. The building of it was once commandeered by his father, yet laboriously raised by many unfortunate misfits over a century now past. His elder had caught them while passing through the area, and commissioned them for their labor, through it all they worked very hard to build it. Unfortunately for them they'd gained a foothold on the location with time and then they tried to build their own cabins nearby. All the folks were mysteriously killed over a short passage of time mysteriously to date not a soul one knows why. Now only the burnt cinders remain of several cabins lay in heaped piles where women and children once lived. This was long before gold or the war brought people by, these were just lost crusaders carrying onward into a spectrum of oblivion.

Endless time brought the crown of the morning sun climbing ever higher above a black abysses called the earth, then came a calling from many of the local forest creatures. A hiding wolf pack called out to someone, yet no reply came. A black bear growled at the door only to sniff his way farther down the trail following his curiously long nose. A yearling chipping sparrow sang out a morning song from up in a nearby Douglas Fir tree. No apparent danger just the morning dew.

He carried her into a bedroom and laid her down where he covered her with blankets made of beaver pelts and coyote hide. He then left her side for another place.

She lay sleeping at the mercy of her maker inside a darkened room where the air was quite damp, cold and full of quietness. Until she awoke and a needle could be heard falling in the extreme silence. Intensely intrigued she made no noises whilst she wondered of many things. His name! "Who was he?" She wondered.

The name of the man that had recently saved her a maybe the house could tell her something even a small clue. She rose from the bed leaving the blankets still warm behind to find a mansion that was dark and full of evading shadows that vanished from behind every creaking doors when she

opened them from inside. A dark hallway was soon to be found only she passed through it quietly leading her out to the main living area. "The dead surely live here where no real human has been for years." She felt certain that it seemed that way. Dust soiled brown sheets that covered the old hand carved furniture, tables and wooden chairs hid ghosts underneath of many dismissed memories. She felt as if she had climbed into a coffin concealed from everyone.

"Who was he?" She thought again while resting for a moment and then further taking time to listen for signs of life existing within the house even a single domestic mouse might provide her some solace but no indoor sounds erupted just the bird's singing in the faraway. No voices, no clues just animal heads living in the walls. She pulled a sheet from one of the sofa's underneath it was nicely made out of pine wood varnished with a darker colored solution. But no clue's, nothing present that might fallout or be lost from the pocket of a rising person.

A wooden mantel held up the weight of a hand carved sail ship on it's upper ledge precariously sailing into a drawn background of the once lively Atlantic ocean.

"Oh! That's spectacular, maybe it was a moment that he had once experienced." She thought as her mind dwelled into the scene of the picture.

Not too far away the man of her concern was cutting wood with an axe and he recently had stopped to sharpen the blade of it. He was setting upon a stump that once supported other wood that had already become cinders inside his fireplace. He heard the sound of footsteps behind him but never turned to see whom it might be.

"You are so very noble, Sir! What ever your name is, and I thank you very kindly for saving me last night." Speaking from behind him.

"What is your name? How can I address you otherwise?" She asked quite frankly.

"Goth! Goth is my name!" He returned lightly and then asked her in a kind manner.

"And to whom am I speaking? Or should I just call you cave woman?" He smartly insulted her while dropping his eyes in order to think further into the conversation.

"Anna. It's my mother's name shared by both of us as she is still alive, she is not a cave woman neither am I."

"Sorry. I didn't intend disrespect actually it is my pleasure to meet someone of your beauty and as you can see I have few guests if ever in this most humble of places, you see there are only miserable travelers that I seldom meet, soldiers or the misfits like the slavers, thieves at best. Soldiers periodically come around for some extra supplies usually for their wounded ones they'll gather up your medicine before heading off to the war in the

east.

“The east do you mean Virginia, or Washington?” She gathered.

“Yes. There are more states trying to join in for the seceders or confederates side last I’ve heard even Texas is getting involved with the southern ranks. I do not condone slavery, nor will I ever. I guess that makes me a wanna be Yankee dog.” He said with a smile strapped across his face.

“Why don’t you join in the war Goth? I mean if you are a Yank?” She brightened up the conversation minutely by asking him such a difficult question as moments passed in his thinking from it.

“I should not leave here from my home and this place only to fight in the eastern man’s great war of brother against brother, good will certainly will prevail without me in it there. It will end soon enough with only one victor probably the yanks.

Left all alone my home would certainly crumble to the earth, falling down under the elements of nature or to those of mankind. I would carry my wounds back to nothing more than black carbon and dust. You see in this place every stranger is your enemy. I give medicine to the yanks that are catching the railroad train heading east because they need it and sometimes even shelter. I kill the slavers if I possibly can because they will kill me. Everyone wants to take something away from you, everyone. There are times when there has been war right here on these grounds, a man has died on the stump from which you now rest my dear. I know because I killed him right there defending my life and home. He was a dammed lunatic who wanted me dead for no reason that I could figure. He’d jumped the morning train falling into the ravine just after crossing over the trestle hoping to find an abandoned house high above in the timber lands. He’d noticed it from the high bend in the tracks before it falls into the valley. When I approached him in the yard he became very arrogant towards me and tried to maul me in the soil. I still carry a scar on my shoulder from his skinning knife, it cut into my flesh deeply, but he is gone from us now and quite dead. Leaving my home for those to plunder would be a disgrace.” For the time being he had almost spoken all of it to her and finally he rested with her on top of the stump and spoke softer to her now.

“What about you. I mean how did you end up in that cave and how many of you were there? I mean women. He spoke further and then hesitated into silence while she thought with him about everything that had been said.

“There were two more women. Maybe they are dead by now at the hands of the Captain or who could know. He would shoot anyone that tried to escape from him even me. Often times he gave me a strong punch in the ribs just to remind me of this one thing. I wanted to break his grubby paws had I been strong enough.”

"He was a brutal man for sure and I should have killed him back at the cave. I would have done so if I had known for sure. Anyway, things seemed to happen so quickly and after the smell of sulfur filled my nose then I knew something was up with you inside the cave I had to discover." He reasoned with her with a little extra sensitivity in order to show her that he could be sympathetic and quite understanding. Oh! I almost forgot who was that man that was not forthright off in the foliage hiding? I was watching him from nearby the cave surely someone must have noticed his stench." His question shocked her and she said.

"I seen no one else around the campsite only the cowboys for sure, and I only smelled a rotting dead thing but I cared not to find it. Was that a living man that smelled that bad?" She had to ask.

"Oh yeah! That was him, I could have fainted from it but I didn't" Goth kind of snickered after saying his piece.

"Gee wiz, What a night." She seemed relieved after speaking and their talking together, realizing each other as friends, or so it seemed."

"Aye. What a night." He seconded. "Hey! Would you give me a hand with this timber? I need to roll it over so it can be cut easier the grain is wrong for me to axe it like that." He asked her nicely.

"Yes for sure." Anna answered. She helped him roll it over.

The sun was close at high noon and the rays from it felt warm upon her skin. She always enjoyed the feeling of it in the month of May a special time of year when her father was borne, last year she forgot to get him a present now she wished she'd remembered to do so. She wondered further about him now.

"Could he be lost?" She thought. He is a free lance artist that can at anytime leave his home to travel far and wide to do a single painting for someone or so inclined otherwise. She knew her father quite well and that he would have to capture and paint a single piece or all of the war somehow. Somewhere he would find the right picture and would paint it in his own very special way. She loved him so much.

A sparrow flew into the old slab shed, it's meddling at the gusset beam caught her eyes bringing her back again out of her daze. Goth was hacking away at the fallen log, swinging with full might against it, yet it splintered ever so slowly it seemed to her. From the size of his large muscle in his arms she knew that he was a back a outback country man accustomed to cutting his own wood and handling heavy objects. She enjoyed watching him work so hard it was good for him not to be slothful. If such a man like Goth could ever be lazy she doubted it. A lazy man she always held in utter disdain and would never marry one not even if he were rich. Only a hardened man that is willing to go the limit to get a job done would she someday choose for her own husband.

"That pine wood is for mighty tough for an axe to cut even if it is

considered soft woods.” She said as her eyes seared away at it if she could burn a slit through the wood with mere vision and would have done so gladly to gather his undivided attention if possible. The afternoon moved along quite nicely for Goth and Anna they seemed to grow together. Goth had slashed enough wood for the night already yet he continued chopping for the sake of having something to do.

A glistening silver creek formed from the glacier higher up the northern territory and dumped into the hollow that held Goth’s log cabin at the threshold of a spectacular thick forest named Sherwood Forest some time ago by his elder father. The misted pines, the fishing, the bluest skies, had saved him from a growing anger after suffering the tragedy of his fathers death and killing.

Goth senior was dreadfully killed one day by a large brown grizzly bear amidst a blizzard that came on early in November and froze the creeks from easy fishing for the bear causing her to be starved. His body was later found by young Goth eaten and mauled close by the old shed. Goth still struggles to escape a haunting memory from the discovery every time he goes near it. Fur from the brown sow that killed him remains untouched and imbedded inside a wood sliver stuck in the space between the wall and it, he won’t touch it ever. The hand of fate led to the snow covering the bear’s tracks quickly preventing her from being hunted down and killed. His fathers claim now spreads out for hundreds of miles in all directions without end it seems. It was once much smaller but he kept grabbing more and more claims as they were surveyed until he died .

“Anna. Please go to shed and grab me a file for this axe head it needs sharpening, you see. I can not go in that place it has haunting memories for me inside”

She boldly went and gathered the flat file, bringing it back for the log to set it upon.

“Something happened in there didn’t it? I can tell there is something beyond. Do you want to speak of it? ”

She asked knowing that it is sometimes better to let certain things go away.

“Yes! There is something beyond me and no..! Please! It upsets me tremendously to speak of it and let’s not spoil this fine afternoon my dear.” He said to her almost apologetically and she understood very well.

She was quite beautiful, and this fact took his mind off of it all. Goth could not help noticing her special womanly features. Her long blond hair curled in places down it’s full length giving it a very sleek appearance as soft as satin could ever be. Electricity gathered strands of her hair into particular parts and crevices of the soiled cotton shirt that she wore and then fell from there down past her perfectly shaped soft feminine buttocks. The white slacks could not conceal the delicate treasure emerging from within them and she boiled with sex appeal at every movement. It was certainly an

excitement for Goth to watch her gracefulness in every gesture and movement as she'd earlier walked to the old shed.

"Anna! Can we go inside the house? I need a break from this wood cutting my back is killing me today. You know it was hurt recently."

"No. I wasn't aware of this." She replied, being somewhat concerned for him.

"Alone, and on a hot day last summer I fell through an eagle's nest from the side of the trestle lying in the meadow below and finally ended up crashing onto the hard rocks below. A mountain lion befriended me there for days, and brought me dead things to eat until I managed to recover by bracing my back and legs with pine branches. She saved my life and hunted for me." He shared his memories with her like they had happened yesterday.

"How long did you suffer upon the rocks?" She inquired of him.

"Only seven days." He quickly answered her inquiry.

"Seven days!" She gasped.

"Somehow that accident helped me get over my fathers death and the hate stigma that I once felt from it happening. For the longest stretch I really hated mother natures critters deeply, but now all that has reverted to normal and I love them once again like I should, because of the mother lion. Since then she has returned and she still wants to mother me like I were her cub somehow. Last time she appeared on the high rocks and hissed at me for awhile." Then he pointed northward to the rocks that grew out of the basin that formed a mouth for his grassy yard.

"What a wonderful creature she must be to have done such a thing." She concluded.

"Yes. Indeed, she is my friend forever... My body grows tired now and I must rest. I have cut all that is possible for now"

With her lovely eyes so full of energy and life Anna studied the mountain side and lower rocks for a short while looking for a movement or clue that might reveal a an existing den for the lioness, nothing, only birds and green foliage stayed there in her sight as the wind moved through the shaking pine needles. Reality had abruptly changed drastically for her in moments, from being an enslaved captive girl to a free respected woman over night befuddled her mind. She was also very tired like Goth and decided to abandon the yard with him for the comfort of the house.

In the kitchen chamber he was preparing a lunch made out of elk meat, green beans and sweet white corn taken from the clay brick shelter out in the rear yard. Many rare adobe bricks were surrendered from the New Mexican territories during his fathers retreat from the Mexican American war years earlier to build it with but now precious glasses filled full of stored garden vegetables harvested in the previous year are kept cool within it for such special occasions.

“Come help! Have you forgotten how to cut greens?”

“No. I’m very talented with cutlery, even a pocket knife! I once used one to escape from a bank robbery back east in Charlotte Virginia, before the confederates became legitimate. They took the loot and left a dynamite bomb inside the safe, later it blew the whole place to cinders. You’ve probably heard of them the notorious Cooley Gang it was later found out it was they that robbed the Smith City Bank killing no one around.

“Yes, Indeed I have heard about it I thought everyone has heard about that heist surely it was a miracle from God you know that no one was killed.” Goth was entranced with memories after speaking.

“Yes truly. She agreed with his declaration and spoke further. “The Cooley Gang has never been caught to date and it’s been proposed that they are hiding out somewhere in Southern Colorado or the Northern New Mexico region.”

“Could this be true?” He suspicioned unto her.

“Maybe. I wonder who that man could have been that was clandestinely hanging around outside of the Captain’s campground last night. A lurcher in the dark. Maybe he was a scout for them or something like that.” Fear boiled inside of her now as she spoke to him about the gang, yet she had grown accustomed to possessing the undesirable feeling of it to a certain degree. I read an article before I left on the stage from Charlotte warning people of cannibalism in the western territories and reaches. The Nottinghamshire Evening Post covered it in detail claiming that there had been cannibals on the loose out here. Who knows about it for sure I mean the eastern reporters are in the east maybe it’s only my imagination going places on me. Surely!”

She spoke of it knowing that invaders can be quite cunning before selectively choosing their prey.

“No ! It is very true my dear, there is such a thing happening here and nearby us it’s very cannibalic. I have seen evidence down near Parcel Town where it is a rampant occurrence happening every month. Most townsmen there are aware of it, the elders gossip continuously from fear of it’s possibilities, mainly.” He said while delving a fork into the browning elk meat inside the sizzling skillet. Greasy steam filled with water vapor shot in all direction as he put the lid back on it burning his finger slightly in the process. He plunged his burnt digit into his mouth sucking on it with his lips suffering to hide his grimace then he returned back to the oak table with her still setting down.

“Would you like to get more comfortable while I cook dinner? There is a robe made out of red yarn that my mother once knitted and used to wear in the guest room where you awoke earlier to the morning in this house. A shower room is available in the den by the large picture window it is very capacious in the bathroom with clean towels. Please make yourself at ease,

because in this place there are no villains living here you are very safe with me. I need no help anymore preparing our supper so please comfort yourself here in this place!” His mouth nearly gathering a foot in it. Goth had lived for ages all alone and had nearly forgotten about women. Trifling chitter chatter had led his thoughts elsewhere to forgot that telling a good woman while working inside the kitchen that her help was completely unnecessary would lead to trouble, maybe later even vengeance. None the less her personality and jovial spirit was received by him like warm water to a frost bitten wound, necessary, and vitally overwhelming. It was warm at the cabin now as the evening proceeded. After a shower Anna had gathered up some cut wood managing to kindle a rising fire in the fireplace after her shower. While placing the wood inside of the chamber there was something unusual she noticed inside of it. The gold in it shined similarly like his father’s life once did. All along the sides of it lie a weaving strand of black carbon soot that never made it up the flue containing traces of gold dust still embedded in the brick from his father’s early smelting discoveries. There could have been ounces of the precious metal lost to the thirsty brick matter as it will absorb the hot burning gold into itself like a sponge will fill from being released down from the hand of a butcher onto the floor of a cattle slaughter house. She liked the feel of the yarn robe around her body it was nice looking and very warm. “Anna come dinner is on!” Goth having finished preparing dinner now called out to her and then repeatedly rang an old supper bell that was once used to beacon him to a meal by his mother.

“I’ll be there in a minute.” She replied back to the yelling stud while looking down the once darkened corridor. It seemed shorter now somehow because many candles were illuminated along it’s full length but in sections only as shadows were sent down from the flame tips above images trembling near the long footboard like night devils sanctioned from the dark powers of the universe to show themselves there. She felt good about Goth. He was nice so far and didn’t seem to be inconsistent at all with her.

Heirloom china decorated the red cloth that covered the oak table top that had lost some of it’s color to time, dinner simmered hot for them both and Anna was anxious to eat some of Goth’s cooking. Elk meat she had acquired a taste for long before coming west and it fell upon her taste buds like honey to a bear. The redness of the creature still remained in the meat and that was the honey for her as she ate with him at the table and life was once again good.

“Go on open a window, it’s a bit smokey in here from the burning wood and hot grease.” She let it out the words even against her breeding even though earlier she had managed to forage from her stock pile of etiquette manners and never spoke of anything about the stanch from all of the smoke that filled the rooms within the grand ole house. He pulled the full sized window towards him into the room where they sat. In the midst of the yard

was growing a severe darkness and warm air from the yard was changing into a night time breeze it crawled up onto his hairy arm.

“Whew! It’s getting cold out there. He said. after opening the window to allow a cavity to exist there. The cooler air challenged a menacing instinct inherent of the sweet earth to be quite uncontrollable like it’s human breed, mankind, and it shook the trees in a high lofty place.

“Did you hear that Anna?” He asked of her quite concerned.

“Yes it was wonderful, Goth! It was only a strong breeze though, it was nothing!” She replied nicely but figured that he could be losing his mind however he wasn’t at all. It was only the blessed mountain wind that spoke to him from outside the window. Many years from living practically alone in the wild had formed him in many unusual ways. Slight changes that happened with mother nature excited him and he knew when things were evolving even from a slight change in the barometric pressure this would reveal something to him. It would tell him of certain peculiarities that might unfold the next coming day like a rain or the oncoming of a dangerous hailstorm.

“I’m getting hot.” She burst out saying. And then she lost it completely.

She could not help herself as the moon must have brought it on. A very deep feeling of passion and obsession overcame her, and love obsession came onto the scene. She tried to restrain herself but could have bent a fork with her will power driven by lust exploding into thoughts. She kissed Goth and he wilted like a chunk of soft homemade ice cream that could fall from her lovely fingertips at any time. He was shocked as she groped towards him like that. Her tender kisses melted softly upon his lips just before her firm breasts appeared before his very own eyes. He was still in shock as her soft hands grasped and held him from the back of the neck kissing him violently. There was nothing to prevent this from happening no hidden power could he find that might come from within his mind to prevent it. His hair stood towards the zenith, and he liked what was happening to him. The spectacle was wild, yet he retained his composure through it all and just set back after the kissing event ever watching her motions as she had suddenly increased her charm by changing into someone very sexy.

“My what a nice kiss that was, thank you very much!” He said to her kindly and felt like he might have blushed.

“It’s been so long since I’ve been around someone really nice like you are.” I just had to find out what....! She stopped speaking in mid stream.

“Yeah! Me too.” He interjected by speaking quickly to prevent a difficult question from arising between them as time could have stood still just then.

The wood flooring of the kitchen lost some of it’s luster to a chunk of elk meat that fell from her utensil ricocheting from the fine china plate and

then splattering grease every where. Goth grabbed the meat from the floor and ate it down with some bread. Both of them laughed at the thought of her dropping it. Goth still had a whitened face as his body perspired and his mind quite surprised yet he enjoyed the kissing from a tender young woman. A coffee pot still humming from inside of the kitchen severed the calm night air while still gaining energy from the heat of a dying wood fire. Flies gathered and swarmed outside the lovers nest at the window's base where they'd found a meal not far away but inside of an abandoned wasp tomb. Brought to it from the smell of the dead queen's rotting brain matter, instinct had told them that her brain parts were softer than the rest of her body so they could eat the soup with chunky parts in it.

Her long blond beautiful hair glistened from the candle light that burned not far away and her precious lips burning hot cheery red awaiting another kiss from Goth. The evening was coming on presenting a full moon sizzling in the southern hemisphere that laid down a white sheet of light against the invisible layer of glass that held up against the cool evening air. A humid coolness grew up from the cabins interior, swelling up into her scent glands partially filling them with moisture from the dampened wood in the log wall. Needing fantasy she looked out of the window imagining that a million stars could be falling at one time all of them coming into one single funnel and the vessel once full of star matter then sky exploded into the galaxy and it all seemed very real to her for a just second. A hand carved chair resisted her weight as she sat back in it looking much like an angel to Goth. Reality was beginning to unraveling a new meaning for him just from her being there. Her presence was very delightful. Cold air permeated the pantry so he rose to close it's door when suddenly a rather weird sound erupted from a north room of the house it was a moaning sound that came about.

"It must have been the wood you know it takes a lifetime maybe more to cure." He said in a soft manner resembling a candle that once burned bright in the hallway now was becoming to dimmer as it flickered along with her voice as she spoke.

"My hair is standing up from it you know. I thought I heard someone speaking to me from the wall or the other side. It came to me from the house I'm sure. I thought I heard some one playing a banjo as well in the background now that I remember better." She declared with almost a scared wicked tongue.

"No! The coldness of the earth sucks upon the fibers of the pine logs and they make odd sounds something that might seem to speak out like it did". Goth projected his voice in a strong sense pretending not to be hiding something. The house and it's way's were familiar to Goth. The voices of many people he'd heard it a million times coming from the walls and other places in other rooms. He'd learned not to be bothered by the sounds that usually came over in some strange language but were distinctly human

voices wanting to be heard by someone.

"Ah! There they are again I'm sure of it. It is people talking through the log wall from the outside." She declared.

Yeah. I hear them too, but what language is that? Goth asked.

"I can't tell exactly it's unknown too me." She replied.

"Goth went to the northern window from where the voices emanated and studied the darkness outside.

"No one is out there that I could see only the trees." He said and then closed the window by dropping the hatch back down.

"I'll go outside to see." He said from the front porch doorway before disappearing into the darkness that it had encompassed. Annie followed to the doorway threshold but lingered there in the light while Goth investigated the northern yard with no lighting present.

"Hey! Annie. He yelled out to her from far away." Then his voice quickly stopped before completing the words. A running man's foot steps fading away into the forest area brought a cold silence casting a chilling spell from within the yard it was a very chilling spell indeed for Anna. She'd never felt such a fast acting and vivid fright all at once quite like it.

"Goth! are you there? She kept repeating over and over again, but there was no one there to return her calling, only a treed racoon responded to her queries with a hissing sound followed by weary eyes that reflected from the light of doorway that shined coming from the cabin. Then a sound of many fading footsteps rushed into her ears before fading into the heavily treed wilderness and pine forestry. In the darkness any trail would be hard to follow even a pure blood Indian in the slight moonlight would have trouble even the best.

"Be quiet please! A voice was cast from a shadow that moved soon afterwards.

"It was Vernon I'm sure!" The voice once declared and then continued. "He's gone for now. Let's go back to the cabin." The shadow spoke again and then Goth appeared from it.

"You really had me scared, Goth I thought you might be dead or something." She said to him.

"Come on I'll tell you more about Vernon Voil. He's our neighbor that lives over the hill."

The lighted doorway of the country kitchen radiantly invited their passage inside where they found two comfortable chairs patiently awaiting someone's return back to them. A warmed English tea pot adorned a cloth covered table top where they both sat close enough to whisper if needed.

"I almost do not want to hear about the last few minutes, Yet! I feel that you do need to tell me some particulars none the less."

"Yes! you should know all about Vernon, it could be dangerous for you otherwise. He is a menace to all, especially for womenfolk. Life could

be good up in these parts but Vernon is always there as a predator and vandal.” Goth explained to her as nicely as he could.

“So Vernon is a criminal and a predator?” She queried.

“Not only that, he’s much... much more.” He said with even a stranger look in his eyes.

“Like what do you mean?” She asked while getting quite pale in the face and furthermore starting to feel very uncomfortable about Goth’s wonderful home in the woods by now.

“Murder and cannibalism I think is illegal in the east but not out here in the wilderness where anything can happen and surely it does. If one day the authorities were to find out they might do something against him but solid proof would be needed and I have nothing to offer them and besides he is much too clever to allow such discoveries of anything that might link him to the cleaning of peoples bones.”

A cold empty feeling of hatred invaded his emotions and a long endured anger began to swell again inside of Goth as he spoke to her at the table. And then the subject changed to another showing Anna’s complete sense for wit.

“I would normally think you were quite mad if I hadn’t just heard some footsteps outside and sensed an evil presence there, I even heard voices and heavy breathing from the walls and wondered from where they came or from whom they belonged to. I have to be honest I am still wondering a little bit, even now.” She said followed by cracking an honest smile.

“Yeah! I suppose it all does seem a little bit surreal. I mean the recent events and especially my behavior, I don’t know maybe I have gone mad, totally whacked I and just don’t know it yet. You that such a can happen to someone!” His voice lowered as he told her an untruth about himself because he knew that he was not crazy but would she believe him other wise.

“No she said I do not believe that you have lost your mind, you don’t seem to be insane or anything like that and besides I personally heard some footsteps. I mean you are much too nice and really caring to be mad. I would know! A very close uncle of mine cracked up back in Boston for good and never to recover. I often cared for when I was young growing up. He was harmless but also very deranged, you can tell because there are signs to watch out for in people. You have none of them and besides you recently saved my life from a true mad man back at the cave. Thank you!” She said.

“Oh yes.... I did.” He confirmed and continued. “Do you know that I have had no other women folk in this place almost of my life. I mean since I were a child with visitors of my father. There aren’t many ladies that get lost out here and if they do the animals probably get them real quick. Reflecting back you might say that I have been sort of a hermit but I have to tell you that I never have really thought deeply into it. Even though I have

been very lonely at times, especially for a woman.” He confessed.

“Mmm!” She cleared her throat but said nothing just listened to his words.

A wax candle replaced an oil lantern that burned well into the evening, as many tales were spun by the both of them remembering the past in many ways.

Annie was a fine story teller a most gifted raconteur to say the least and she could be sharp as a knife’s edge with it. When it came to humor she excelled top notch by always laying something funny down for everyone to enjoy. Mostly good humor but not always. Her mother had told her many times that she should pursue a career in the theater, and she intended to do just that when the captain’s presence appeared at a saloon next door to the Iron Cappolla theater where she was auditioning for a part in a play called “The Presence”. Two days later she was held as his captive in the back of his cheap wagon that was stealing away buggy miles en route to the wild western frontier of Colorado. Sanity was her only real possession at the time, but it carried her through all of the torture from the evil man named the captain until the precious moments came shining through with Goth. Her captor only fondled her at night whilst she slept near his feet. The other women seemed to protect her from him, yet they too were being held as captives and as slave women. It was a tragedy of the times that all three women like many others were eventually destined to be for sale at a brothel in the state of California, no mercy for any of them. One of the girls that had befriended Annie for her innocence also became a victim of the captains lust for flesh. She resisted his filthy desires and aggressions but was repeatedly beaten down by the captain until she resisted him no more, leaving Anna only to wonder of her near ultimate fate. She remembered the horrible moments of that time and others as she lay warm in Goth’s bed that night with him lying next to her while watching a crescent shaped moon move across the sky only to cast fear within her mind until finally she fell asleep.

Morning came and no human stirred other than those still under some woolen blankets or yarned quilts with which to cover their bed. A sparrow became momentarily missing from it’s flock whilst being lost inside the darkness of their room. A sparrow feather floated in the air with it’s pilgrimage ending upon the wooden floor below broken and straddling a dirt clod. Soon a wind arose outside the house that grew in great intensity and velocity. Woo! Woo! Was the sound that arose from the yard and from the old tree that shielded a hiding grouse in the tall weeds from the prevailing breezes. It’s head quickly turned around as the sparrow escaped back to it’s flock by flying under the old wooden shutter that was temporarily held opened by the gusting wind. An old tack shed that revealed many years of passing time leaned into currents of the traveling breeze. The years counted by the many scars and scrapes that had been left by many visiting entities

some alive others dead or dying within time. The leaves of a miracle cottonwood tree sometimes shook and chattered against each other as their edges touched while moving too and fro in the wind, yet later healed against time and wear by mother nature and the tree. The sound of ten thousand locust could not have been stronger sometimes as the tree held it's own with the blasting wind gusts. The sounds of the yard kept a sense of well being inside Annie's thoughts while her dreams flowed ever forward. She had found peace in a place or at least was destined to find it in the majestic valley with Goth as some years passed.

**I came** too Goth and Annie as a boy creature from the wilderness fifteen years ago long before the war had ever started and the people were unchanged by it then. You see I had already spent six months of living like an animal out in the wilderness and back country before meeting them one favored day.

My loving father had been killed by a greedy band of slavers and my mother had soon after that died from the plague leaving me all alone with very little means in which to survive the harsh conditions of the western wilderness all alone and barely reaching my sixth year of life after birth.

I had been given the Christian name of Seth by my dead parents most everything else I probably would have forgotten over time due to my young age. As normal recollection had been removed from my life even my birth date has been forgotten and lost to antiquity. I can remember that perhaps my mother had told me as I was learning to speak the English language what day it fell on but at that early time in my life dates and events meant very little to me.

I had been laying in a dug out that I had covered with branches and other foliage that had long ago been dried out from the weathering elements of time. Old articles of my mother's clothing had been piled onto the frozen earth forming a bed in my abode for comfort and now the garments were soiled black.

It was cool in the air as I arose to the morning sunlight finding the snow still to be very hardened and chunky from the below zero temperatures of the night before. The frosted matt of snow broke underneath my moccasin covered feet as I went walking through it. There was a trickling stream nearby that hadn't been completely frozen yet since the cold came only months ago. Along cracks and fissures there was fresh water still flowing underneath the top layer of ice that ultimately had sustained my life. A mist from a cloud still loitered in the valley where the creek was at and I followed a trail that took me there to the stream. I had been very smart over the months and had kept a hole in the sheet of ice hollowed out and opened from hitting it with my walking stick.

"Crack!" It sounded and broke again as I impaled it with the hard part of my walking cane. The water made my stomach boil as I drank it down

after paling it up into my cold hands and then into my mouth. Food came into my mind and a memory of meat simmering in the fire pit or of my mother's apple pie shot into my brain like a charge of explosive energy that motivated me to move on into the crisp air of the already harsh day.

"Another dead thing to be eaten," I dreaded to think of all of the frozen dead things that I had swallowed down. I can't say that I have adapted to the smell of rotting flesh because it still bothers me. Partly thawed animals bodies found frozen to the forest floor could make for a meal but on colder days it might not thaw. I preferred the light of a sunny day where usually I could track in the footsteps of a coyote or of a lone wolf and oftentimes they'd even share in the fresh kill if there is one. I had been learning from the canines how to survive all along. The pesky squirrels even had something to show me. It was last fall and I can remember them chattering back and forth to one another from the forest floor. They were fighting over a stash of pinon nuts and were piling them away inside the vacated hole's of many a Douglas Fir trees. Over the months I even learned to climb the trees like the squirrels or the racoons and the pinon nut stashes or dead beetles piles sometimes provide me a tasty energy snack.

It was cold in the wind as I air dried my hands in the falling air that sunk back to the ice covering over the creek. I pretended to feel no pain while squeezing my fingers together and shaking them up and down until the water cleanly dripped from them leaving a moist shell of freezing water to burn away at them. It was hard getting some water in the morning but it even harder to follow the wolf packs during the day as my body ached for more energy and nourishment to follow their trails. My pain from near starvation was so great that I could barely endure and yet I found even a stronger instinct inside of me even stronger than pain. I would not end up like the dead animals that I had been so lucky to find for food, somehow I would survive.

The night before while I lay resting warm and snuggled inside my mothers clothing there had been a coyote howling up on the ridge due north of my haunt. Courageously! Later in the evening he decided to come in closer to check on me to see if I had extra dead things laying around my nest, perhaps to steal them. He left with no prize because I had nothing laying outside for him but rather coveted a frozen squirrels body inside my shack that I kept hanging from a stick. "Today I will track him." I thought. I will follow his tracks until they lead me somewhere even to his kill. "Dirty old shack." I yelled out into the valley as I began to gather a few things for the journey from my stick home. My Canteen was full of water, I had my frozen squirrel that was now beginning to thaw and stinking up the place, and my Buffalo hide coat. "I was ready and very hungry!"

The old coyote had left a nice trail for me to follow because he had very large paws for a coyote, he was huge and heavy and took long strides. This

revealed that he had been eating well and was a good hunter. It could also mean that he might back track and take me as a prey. I would have to be more very careful from now on. I knew that he could easily kill me if he decided to change his hunting tastes and then to turn on me. It could be quickly done if I were ambushed somewhere out in the open country. Hunger was my only real defense against such a mighty creature which made me seem fearless to all animals even more fearless than the lone coyote.

The tree shadowed walls of my hidden valley finally led me to a narrowing ravine which at last revealed an awesome blue heaven. The northern skies I had been avoiding up to this date because from that region could be found the slavers camps. Even then I continued in following his endless paw prints that led me onward maybe even a clear trail to somewhere even more dangerous.

The trail continued on for miles heading due north perhaps seeking out an elk herd I considered and then the prints began to meander a little back and forth as he went along as if he were sniffing for a scent of some sort. Then at last I could see in the broken snow what his secret was, he was hunting field mice under the snow blanket while traveling along and he'd left me a fresh one. It wasn't much of meal but the meat would nourish me for a few more miles of traveling and I quickly gulped it down after biting it's head off with my teeth. I traveled farther until the clouds began to lightly drop snow flakes as I grew ever more tired from sinking deep into the snow banks that were hidden amongst the shallower levels. The coyote seemed to effortlessly channel his direction of travel over the deep troughs of snow as if he were made out of feathers while I was made to endlessly dip into them time and time again over the long and treacherous miles that already I had traversed until finally I became horrified when I noticed the sky up above.

The day was nearing an end already, and I hadn't realized it. I had forgotten to follow the trajectory of the sun with my mind because of my exhaustion from the tiring day and now the life sustaining sunlight was beginning to steal away from me by escaping beneath the western horizon. The difficulty in traveling had taken my mind to far away places and it was not until I had descended down a very steep mountain ridge that I realized the passing in time. My survival depended on me finding shelter of some sort, even a tree could provide a wind break from the cold breezes that sometimes carried snow rifts with them. My once thawed squirrel was now frozen again as the evening started to come on and the shadows that were earlier cast from the zenith sunlight now had begun to crawl further and further deeper underneath the high trees of the steep walled valley. I became angry at myself and threw the dead squirrel far away from me and I cursed at it while it rolled away like a hard stick would roll end over end making a dull thumping sound loud enough to be heard a short distance

away until it's momentum expired by crashing against a hard rock that stopped it's progress. I was tired of eating rotting things and I decided that I would rather die than to have to smell that same stench again because the frozen body parts of dead things must first be brought to thaw inside one's mouth and then finally swallowed down. It was horrid but that was the only way to get frozen food.

This part of the highlands was full of heavy tree covering and dried grass foliage from the summer before. The grasses had grown very high over time on this particular side of the mountain during the warmer weather month's. As the extra sunlight and moisture had brought all of the seedlings to their fullest extension of growth and I wondered if I would ever live to see the lower parts of the green grasses that existed just underneath the current snow line. The skies were beginning to darken before my very eye's and the wind was also picking up speed out of the north even though it began blowing slightly at first still the changing wind speeds were easy for me to notice because of the bite that it took as the cold tore into my flesh like knife. A howling suddenly erupted not to far away sending me off scurrying to find some protection underneath a thick branched fir tree. A night had not passed since winter had come into the high country that a fog did not seep into the region and this night was no different from the rest as the valley began to darken with low cloud matter and the moon could faintly be seen.

Hours passed and I began to wonder, "did I smell smoke?" the fog had began to lighten up slightly and the scent of burning wood aroused me from the sheltering umbrella that the tree provided. Then I seen it coming through the misty fog and for sure it was the glinting sprawl of a shining light as my eyes dare not lie to me at that time. I had taken a shallow whiff of someone's campfire and seen a light and this was not an illusion, surely there must be a human presence there as well, I thought.

It became colder as I approached the dwelling place of a stranger. It could have been a band of slavers for all I cared because there was food down there and I could smell it cooking as I became nearer to it. Elk meat was cooking in the fire and the sweet smell of it came pouring into my nostrils like water would flow into them. The scent of the fresh meat drew me ever closer to it's source until finally at last the forest opened up into a large clearing that had long since been swallowed up by a old wooden cabin. The weathered cabin had tolerated many years of high winds as the clay roof revealed from the gaping holes that sent light from inside emanating outwards. "Maybe it had been lost in time just like me." I thought. There was a glass opening and through the narrow window I could see a woman moving about. Her long curly brown hair reached for the floor as she moved around inside while attending to something. She was very beautiful to view from afar by and oftentimes her lean silhouette would disappear

from my sight only to shortly reappear. It was Annie my adoptive and loving new mother to be.

It was wonderful living with her and Goth and sharing in their life, yet I was to become a man now and something was calling me away to another place in time. A restlessness for something more over come me one day so I headed for the south bound train.

In the year of 1862 a freak rain befell upon the mystical valley from where a train full of northern union soldiers rolled heading southward carrying all of them and Seth to fight for union. It was not an uncommon practice during the early years of the war to become volunteered for service unknowingly or otherwise. It sometimes happened.

Seth awaking to the sound made by the twisting iron of the boxcar sent him into a panic for a second of time then he sorely gathered himself.

"What in the hell is going on?" He yelled out of fright and being heard by the other soldiers.

"Your going to the war son, somewhere south." One of the older soldiers responded loudly over the noises of the straining metal from the train's iron parts before another one spoke up briefly.

"Yeah! The Civil War calls for us all." He seemingly boasted to the other's aboard. One man silently shook his muzzle loading rifle into the air as a salute to the earlier man's statement yet only a silhouette of it appeared to Seth's eyes from within the darkness of the damp train. He was soaking wet and angry, while still trying to figure out what had happened to him. Then he figured it out, he'd been kidnaped to fight in the war for the north side, the Yanks.

"How did I get here?" He asked one of the older men present preferring to get a straight answer.

"Oh, we took you away. You see little Carl over there he carried you in his arms like a little babe all the way down to the trestle from near your place where we loaded you up. The conductor of the train has been told to make frequent soldier pickup stops. I guess the captain likes the way you outback fellas can shoot a rifle and he wants to put you in his elite squad as sharp shooters soon enough.

"You mean I don't have a choice whether or not to fight in the war?"

"Not you! And, oh! I wouldn't be missing any targets for the captain he will not like that at all. He might see it as an act of treason, he's not very understanding about things like that, believe.. me....!"

"Yeah! I'm listening too you." He growled.

"Back in Indian country he beat a man half to death in front of a crowd because he wouldn't wear his military uniform properly it really ticked him off, he's mean and these guys will back his play, so watch out young man." The old timer advised to him. He thought about it all for a moment and then

expressed his remorse by saying.

“Dammit to hell...!” He bolstered out loudly and then quickly began to gather his thoughts. What about Anna and her well being? For her well being he could only wonder what might become of her until he might someday return to his cabin maybe to discover something more about her. “She must be wondering about me, this is a tragedy” He considered then he remembered Goth his step father.

Suddenly there was a scuffling above on the ceiling of the rail car where two men fell inside the rolling box car and onto the filthy floor by first shimmering down along both sides of the doorway cavity seeming as if they had been professionally trained to do so. It was Bob and Little Ermon he recognized them both by their ridiculous voices, and tendency towards calamity. They were much like kin folk to him neighbors as well.

Both Voil boy’s had grown up thinking that one of them was brought onto gods green earth to live as a werewolf and it was Ermon. Whom ever convinced them of this idea he had no knowledge but he knew that both boys were sincere with this idea. Seth had watched both Bob and Little Ermon grow up to become strong young men and he cared for both of them. Why they ended up here on this train he pondered while they fumbled around in the dark before gaining some night vision.

“Hey! Seth it’s me. Seth! I’m over here fella’s.” He said then lit a wooden match for them to see. “Come on over let’s talk.” He delightfully said.

Others followed along behind them as the whole bunch approached me. I was scribbling in the moonlight lost inside some of my writings from my personal journal and I hesitantly stopped as they looked down at me. The voice from one of them was loud enough to penetrate through the rattling caused by the train.

“What is your name sir?” He asked in a mild and somewhat humble way.

“My name is Seth! And what is your’s?” Was my friendly reply to the tall soldier.

“Sir! My name is Sir Dave but you can just call me sir!

“We thought you looked somewhat bewildered and maybe even confused, so we came over talk with you as maybe there is something that we can discuss. You know we are going to war and you’ll be fighting on my side at Gettysburg. Who’s the other fellows?” He asked and then pointed at them with his finger.

“You’ll have to ask them.” I stated.

“That is my hairy brother Ermon, he is my age practically, we are step brothers.” Bob spoke up.

“He looks different than most other people aside from being extremely hairy he looks like he could get mean very easily.” The second soldier John

spoke up and then silenced again.

“Oh! Yes!” Ermon replied and then looked strangely at the others. “He’s a very good fighter and he is fearless as you’ll soon see at the front. Ermon likes plenty of excitement in his life and once he gets started it’s impossible to stop him without first there being a lot of blood shed. Believe me I have the scars to prove it!” He said and then mistakenly revealed them.

“Hey! Ermon! Are you a fighter, or a big coward? You look almost like a hairy mutt to me.” The second soldier boldly yelled out sending his words across the box car.

Ermon was innocently watching the passing landscape from the threshold of the car door just passing time when suddenly he became provoked and his ears quickly moved a little backwards showing some definite movement backwards in reverse. I knew something was going to go down.

“Your brother is a freak of nature! The smart mouthed soldier injected another sentence to compound the level of anger building and foolishly trained his eyes back on me with a sense of coldness inside them. Ermon then rose back onto his feet and approached the talking men from the rear.

“Turn around! And look at Ermon the freak, he is right behind you now, fellas.” Bob said with a tone of sarcasm carrying in his voice. Ermon had changed slightly and his wolfen form had transformed him slightly into a beast with cold yellow eyes as he moved directly behind the wise guy soldier in only an instant.

Sir Dave did not believe that Ermon had relocated so quickly behind them yet he turned out of fear. I spoke to them and the other more silent soldiers as they all stared into the eyes of Ermon and death as well.

“Gentlemen you shouldn’t anger Ermon like that I said, it’s not healthy for any of us here in this boxcar don’t you know?” I honestly spoke to all of them while they listened intently to me. By now every soldier was watching the show go down.

“I think that Dave should jump out of the train right now and catch another ride. Ermon declared.

Who agree’s? I asked the whole troop inside the train car and the majority raised their hand. Some of them even spoke up saying “Throw him out, get him out of here!” They said.

“Well it’s agreed then, Sir your just not welcome here any more and your just going to have to leave us.” Ermon boldly declared.

“What I ain’t jumping off this train for nobody not even you and your wolf brother!” Dave stated while staring at the angry crowd of men.

It happened much to quickly for David and I think he must have been mortally shocked because Ermon lifted him over his very hairy head and then he threw him head first into the gravel shelf that lined the sides of the

railway track of the existing territory. I quickly looked out of the doorway only to watch the dead man's broken body fall over a cliff edge falling to the bottom for the buzzards to feast upon. Ermon felt pleased after killing Dave and I have to admit that I admired him for standing up to Dave even though the other's in the troop had become fearful of us and unfriendly because of the incident. The men were acting strangely as the sun fell from the evening sky and left a blanket of darkness to fill the void. Now only starlight penetrated the darkness beset from a new moon. It was a cold inside the boxcar especially after the killing of David. His silent friend had managed to crawl into a mental shell which made matters worse, but the other men paid him little mind as he lingered in the shadows of the boxcar's far corners. He was without direction because he'd managed to lose his leader and there was no one to guide him along it was as if his mind had taken a leave. I felt absolutely nothing for him. As the evening proceeded the men fell asleep one by one and eventually their fears of Ermon and Bob had given away to drowsiness and exhaustion but there was some talk throughout the night as some of the men refused to rest. Often times they spoke of a place in Virginia called Manasses and General Irwin McDowell was to be the leader there. Outside Manasses Junction was to be our destination I supposed but I wasn't going to be there I thought that for sure.

The sound of the scathed hardened rail beams carved a new image into my thoughts metal to metal the heat of fire charring into some steel and certain opinions were set forth from my shortened experience with the soldiers, and their brutal behavior towards one another. These men both young and old possessed a true nature towards killing each other and they were driven by loyalties far beyond myself.

"What foolishness" I thought! Killing has never been hard for me, but with a reason, these fellows needed none, so I judged. It was at that very moment that I decided that I would never become a soldier for the sake of killing, I needed more of a purpose to end another's life than mere hatred which by now had grown inside me. My abhorrence for some of the others more cruel than my friends the Voil boys suddenly grew into a passionate frenzy as the air inside the train car suddenly grew thin. I could feel the hot breath of ten or more blood thirsty men with rifles and bayonets attached encircling us three invaders.

"Lord help us." I quickly thought as fear invaded my mind!

"Ermon wake up they re coming to kill us!" I yelled loudly as the sound of my voice was swallowed up by the creaking Batten Boards of the loaded box car. He moaned until I swiftly kicked him in the ribs and then he responded instantly by growling and then suddenly rising to is feet as the pack of men encircled us ever nearer. Finally his eyes perceived their gathering and sensed a danger immediately. He roared ever louder until every sound was flattened, yet the soldiers kept gathering to come in on us.

Ermon lashed out at them with his claws as he was starting to change into a werewolf form it seemed. His hair even seemed grow ever longer and his body was beginning to sweat and contort.

He would have killed them all right there in the train if I would have let him go on with it, but for a moment he still had partial senses left and I encouraged him to jump from the rolling train by grabbing his hand and yelling to him.

“Come on, I said and Bob followed. “

Come on brother.” He screamed. All three of us jumped out of the rolling box car delving into the dark night and unknown territories somewhere west of the Potomac river.

I lost grip from Ermon’s hand during the flight from the portal of the box car and my awareness soon followed as the cheeks of a full grown ass cushioned my fall.

Ehh! Haa! Ehh! Haa! The ass bellowed out loudly over taking the sound of the forbidden rolling train wheels.

Haa! Haa! It resounded with ever more anger.

I’d flown through the air and hit squarely onto the rump of full grown ass and now was sprawled over still it’s rear end partly clinging to the rear ankle of the excited mongrel. It bucked wildly to clear it’s rear quarters and soon I was in mid air once again traveling head over heels until finally gravity arced my flight bringing me down to Earth quite wounded, dazed, and horrified.

Now Facing me was the animal that my flight had frightfully violated fortunate for me that he was wiser than most others since he had become quite forgiving to say the least as he stared me down anyway albeit through confused eyes. I carried my body with tired persistence and in utter physical agony towards an abandoned buckboard that had earlier come into view. I immediately fell onto the moist Earth until consciousness left my mind and darkness prevailed.

I had two unlikely experiences that night neither will I ever forget. One of a train and the other of a mule. It was my finest hour as calmness eventually filled the green meadow where I lay underneath a shabby old wagon but a troublesome rain storm was brewing overhead in the heavens and of this I was not knowing.

The mule went back to feeding upon the grasses in the glen that allowed for a small farm house at the rise and a few other features belonging only to mankind and not really to the earth, but belonging only to an era. Heat lightning developed as the mule turned evermore into the storms direction while eating more grasses from the ground. Electricity became more intense as it was smeared through the low laying and darkened clouds that were churning like water inside a boiling tea pot. The mule looked upward feeling like a captured piece of salt inside a home made ice cream maker.

His laying mat of hair turned upwards. By now he had forgotten all about the rude man that tried to ride him so keenly. His concern was for the tumultuous skies and the soon to be helter skelter that was soon to become his fate. He quickly withdrew to the heights of the glen where he hugged a large sycamore tree root nearby the old shanty.

Crack! A bolt of lightning erupted from above and escaped down to the ground instantly sending a resound many miles far and away from there. Then another charge of sizzling high speed electricity was pulled out of the meadow land ripping chunks of earth as it traveled upwards to reach it's destination and upon it's arrival the sky lite up like a magnificent candle that had suddenly been torched.

The rusty old wagon that now draped a perfect hand brake had often rested in the meadow undisturbed but now it teetered back and forth to the power of many treacherous winds. The age old steel of it's frame often becoming quite shinny by resembling quicksilver under the full light of a noon day sun as the flowing juices of the molten sky illuminated it's rusted parts from above and laterally from below as sizzling beads of quantum matter burned trails of scorching brown to the once green grasses.

Ehh! Hahh! The mule sounded again out from underneath the knotted tree as he totally disfavored the storms coming on. Yet the rain did come against his favor thereby invading the puffy cloud filled hollow with sounds like Tick, tick tick, tick, tick, tick and on and on as droplets of rain fell upon the broken twigs and dried foliage that once lived there until it began to pouring liquid water like out of a bucket. Moisture saturated the air and became cool humidity that rose to an extreme level as even a dropped rifle pouch would echo for a much longer distance.

"Ahh! My head", I mumbled while barely waking up to the covering of the rain as it rose up around me.

"Get to the top of this thing, it'll float." I uttered in a weak breath while desperately trying to look over and afar but could not see a thing through the rain only the ground nearby could he see as it suddenly disappear into a shell of glistening clear water. It was not long and all of the meadow from the sycamore down to the wagon was carrying more than it's portion of water as I hung to the side of the steel contraption because it was his safe haven for dear life. My leather moccasins were bloated with water providing for a heavy pull in the fast flowing current yet his clothing was smooth and the water poured over them. Logs of tremendous size began to appear in the water coming from the split much higher in stream as the flood grew in size but his hands held firm to the wagons side.

"I can't do this much longer!" I had to yelp but desperately I held onto the cart.

And suddenly there was a sound so close behind him that the volume nearly wasted his ears it came from behind him in the stream.

Ehh! Ahh! Ehh! Haa! I quickly turned my head around to see but there was no time for it because the mule using his unbridled head desperately lifted me out from the rushing water. Lifting me up and over the side of it and finally pushing me onto the top of the floating wagon just in time to save my life from a passing timber that caught the poor mule by his back leg into a leaf congested branch drowning him mercilessly. Only a pool of air bubbles remained that quickly dispersed into the flood where there once was a living creature a true hero. "The glen will surely miss him." I thought while looking back as I stayed atop of the floating wagon and meandered with it to where ever the gushing flood waters were going to take my wretched soul as surely the swell would drain into some other greater waterway, or so I hoped. Many times I could have disembarked from my ancient raft, yet the old wagon floated well and from a tree branch I'd even fashioned an oar of sorts. Nothing to brag about but by breaking it at the correct angles it served a purpose that suited me well.

Witnessing dawn on the coming morning by painfully straining my two eyes in order to see from underneath a pair of very swollen eyebrows only to see the morning's first light reveal a disaster of unimaginable proportions whilst still banging around through the countryside on my floating barge. Somehow my small ship had been gathered up by the swift flowing waters of a much greater river perhaps tributary to the Potomac. I was heading back towards the front lines of war I reckoned. Heading towards a place of even greater death and despair, but surely it was destined to intensify.

It crossed my mind to wonder about the Voil boys whether the soldiers had them captive or not.

"Not for long." I soon reasoned. Following that issue I dreadfully feared for their safety as they could have no way of knowing about Ermons strength or of his power to quickly kill many of them and then disappear somewhere as he was totally an immortal like his father Vermon. His powers could be brought on quite easily I now believed.

"He might kill them all." I figured. And what of the full moon cycle that was soon coming for him, it would be a disaster for all. A complete blood bath bath for union and rebel soldier's alike. Never has he had so many willing participants so close by. Killing was in his nature and the human being was his virtual prey. I reasoned that both of their fates belonged to the wind, the moon, and the stars and that I could not change destiny. Yet my life was held intact only by this water logged wagon that currently kept my heart beating and my mind still active and alive so I paddled on and on dodging everything upstream that I could see even the wild beaver and the swelled bodies of the dead critters that were carried to the surface by the under currents of the moving stream.

By afternoon and about a half mile upstream from my floating wagon a stream of darkened smoke puffed from the tumid bank growing in size while

gently rising up and finally gone into the humid air lost to the hanging branches of the nearby weeping willows. The river was in certain bends and turns swallowed completely by the hardwoods and other greenery that had long since boldly marched onto the waterway's once shallow and sandy banks but now left enough space for a nice looking solitaire campsite. One that I headed for with all my rowing might against all odds fighting the strength of a mighty current. A mocking bird imitated the sound of my boyish whistle as I approached sending it reverberating into the crook nearby my shallow scuttling craft. A woman's clothing hung from a wounded tree branch with a brown European squirrel standing bulwark ready to defend her honor with great pride while holding his ground aloft. He resented my coming there and showed it by presenting his skinny little claws before such a lowly human thing like me while sharing a grisly snarl that proved to be permanently set upon his battered and wrinkled little snout towards me.

Bewildered and still splashing some water around with my moccasin covered feet a very kind voice interrupted from close by and ended my meeting with the fearsome tree creature abruptly. There was a young, black, and very beautiful woman overlooking our chatter session. She had been picking some exiled blackberries from the surrounding lumber land stealing whole heartedly from each living stem a wholesome bounty of fruit both for herself and her adopted fur buddy. Our very dedicated squabbling with loud piercing voices had disrupted her lullabies and travels from where she hastily returned back to the long awaiting rivers edge.

"And who are you that the walnut eater dislikes you so much?" She asked with her keyed voice that was still in tune. Pretending never to have been singing a song or praise that I might have over heard. Her long black satin like hair draped only to fall gently onto her lovely breasts in front.

"Excuse me Mam!" Was all that I could muster for words as my tongue became like a spoiled whip at the end of a long cattle round up.

"You okay ?" I asked of her like a timid sheep that might bellow an awful sounding Ahh! Ahh!

"Yes! we are doing just fine here , Ahh! Me and nutty that is. We have held close to the shores of the Rappahannock river and have lingered in the woods since last years cold went farther north, far, far, away from us." She replied, while being somewhat relieved that an ounce of danger had quickly passed from our meeting like strangers this I she could easily identify in her.

"I guess I'll be leaving now, ahh, farther down the river I'll go." I had to say it to her being so polite and all even though it was the last thing on my mind as I backed into the river from where I came.

"Don't go!" Hesitantly she spoke as if Nutty needed me as a friend and not her.

“The woods are frightening during the night, I have heard things out there, you know the blood curdling type of sounds. It frightens Nutty. Sometimes I wonder if I shouldn’t go for the towns where the white folk reside. At least I might feel safe there.”

“You’d be somebodies slave, you know.” It came out of me so quickly, then I frowned and I quickly hid my eyes from her, yet she excepted my words very well.

“Yeah! Maybe for awhile then I would leave again for another part of the woods. Maybe I’d head farther west as the crow flies where the black people are somewhat freed now, you know from the seceder’s, the slavers.”

“I’m tired of dealing with the anger of other people especially white folk.” She said. “I’ve been a slave all my life and I have seen what being a ruler does to common folks, it’s not good. God did not mean for life to be spread out like that, you know from one to the other, it’s wrong. I could live here on these river banks just me and my squirrel friends and be quite happy and content no problems forever.” She told me.

“Forever is a very long time.” I said, yet tension had a hold of me and I felt insecure from my thoughts because for sure I knew there could be human anger at hand.

“Your fine looking young man. Tall, strong, and handsome but your also white. How could someone like you ever love a black person like me, I was once a slave?” A part of her honestly wondered but she knew it was mainly a delusion of hers to think that way.

“You are quite beautiful Mam. You have long wonderful legs and dainty feet to support your wonderful figure of a woman. The sweetest facial features and I am deeply entranced with your beauty. Can’t you tell by my behavior? Yes I am fascinated with you and suffering from extreme desire for you. You see, I have never had a woman like that, you know to care for me in that way.” I said with a slight sneer perched up on my face ready for anything to happen.

Her frustration began to fade because she sensed that I was not like everyone else. I was slightly different and possibly maybe even an honest man and she knew it. What is your name? She asked me.

“Seth is the name that my mother gave to me, yet there may be more. She and my father are both dead, you see” I reluctantly answered her.

Moments of silence passed while she thought about my demeanor and then she guessed the tragedy of my early years in life. Perhaps caring enough not to make me relive those moments she stopped the questioning.

So what are you doing here in this time and place, Seth? She asked of me another very difficult question very hard to answer quickly. Such deepness would be instantly required. But this time she had been watching me like a starved sparrow hawk might watch a prairie rat from a simmering hot barrel cactus, perhaps trying to find some confusion that might lie within

my mind. I had to come up with something to say.

“Traveling here and there, you know kind of homeless, maybe even I’ll join in the war to fight for freedom. I really don’t know.” I finally gathered an answer smartly.

“Guess I’ll be leaving you now.” I boldly stated to her and shouldn’t have.

“Yeah! I guess you will.” She had to say before pausing her sentence with a short moment of silence.

“But then.....” She extended her words out whilst she crawled her first finger along her pretty face next to her temple holding the tension up to a high level as it grew also inside of me.

“Unless.... Of course you might want to sleep the night out on the sand right her upon my cosy little Island paradise. Besides in the darkness that mean ole river and it’s tricky currents will only carry you to a young death. A drowning death would be horrible I suppose.” She carried on knowing that he might certainly die against the swirling dangers of the river.

“Can I stay here with you for awhile? I asked her of her in a sheepish voice and timid manner.

“Certainly! You are welcome here, most of the critters here on this Island do not care about travelers except those of the glen of course which are full of feistiness like the badgers. It is still early in the day perhaps an hour before dusk, come help me gather some firewood.” She offered.

“Yes Mam.” I quickly said to her as she turned and walked away proceeding farther inland leaving me to drag and dock the floating wagon at the waters edge where a cat fish dredged in the mud with his tail fin brushing at the stern.

The Island was full of insect life and the atmosphere vibrated from their essence and sounds that they made. A constant hum occurred from the locust that filled the Island forest and river bank. As thousands of them were hiding in the dense foliage of the place yet so very keenly camouflaged from the hideousness of the flesh eating Preying Mantis that might attack them later that night devouring them.

The water caressed the Island as it flowed along the banks behind me now as I had deserted it for a short while preferring to follow her meandering foot tracks through the wooden thickets and trees. Her tracks were easy to follow since a full grown woman can with her toes dig into the wet sand. Besides the largest toe of her right foot curved inward just slightly making them very unique as a pair and easy to identify.

“Huh! A beautiful disappearing woman. A castaway ?” I thought while following the trail that took me inland to places unknown. So very magnificent and splendid too behold was this small Island that lie somewhere in the southern territory maybe even inside a confederate state. The lushness of the tall grasses that grew in the nearby swamp distilled an

enchancing moment for me as the reflected light from a nearby pond escaped through the tall blades and sharpened my eyes with the receding sunlight during this warm summer evening. The bleeding heat from the sun had intensified slightly after midday and finally now it was beginning to lessen some as the nearest star in the heavens had began to dissolve into the western horizon. Yet I still dripped sweat from every pore in my body. Lack a cooling breeze I found a shade tree to rest my liquid drained body and to think about the confounded woman for whom I had recently become so bewildered with.

“Who was she?” Curiosity caused me to wonder for sure. Escaped slaves can be treated very badly in these parts for no good reason and there was still a bounty for the women folk. It didn’t matter to me that much personally, but what about her? If she were an escapee then all the more reason for me to help her if I could. At that very moment I began to feel the intensity of it all, slavery, ownership of another person, and suddenly it hit me to the bone, of how wrong it was. A tear poured out of my eye and I wasn’t even crying it just happened that way.

“What moral right did one human have to own another person’s body to use for his own work, bidding or desires.” I believe soon after that moment that I had become an abolitionist, later I knew it was true. My sense of morality was offended even by the thought of it. Later I knew that there would be much more to understand about slavery, and punishment before I might see the end of it all if ever possible.

A breeze erupted out of the south that shook the sycamore tree directly above me. The moving wood relaxing my mind ever more with its creaking sounds until finally sleep came into me under the tree. Dreams that come and go from a person even when they are sleeping under a shade tree filled my resting mind that day around dusk.

In my dream I saw a field full of cotton crop with many black pickers present while gathering there to harvest the bounty from its puffy bolls of cotton while they also spoke of a budding southern secessionism and I overheard it all as two young black men were speaking in a partly hushed manner while picking.

“What do you think about our southern lords trying to fight against the north and the fighting man president Lincoln?” A much larger man asked.

“You mean the president freedom. Some folks say that he’s secretly like an abolitionist kind of man, a very complicated sort of fellow. Let us hope for sure.” They both snickered quietly. It’s like chittlins and beans when you get the pot to boiling later on the beans take a good taste from the gut but it has to boil for awhile before getting there to a pleasant sapidity.”

“You mean it tastes great, right?” Both men laughed after the other slave smartly inquired.

“Yeah! For some folk. Others say that it smells bad and turns their

nose up and downright stinks, but not everybody.” The other responded while removing a burr from his injured thumb.

A black crow from overhead that was diving in and out of the water furrows from had gathered up a passel of stick and twig and carried it into flight heading northwest towards Richmond leading the way for me as my mind soared along as well. The shock from seeing the vision of a burning city suddenly awoke me from my sleep.

I opened my eyes from a vision of time and progress and found myself in the realm of darkness, yet the gentle smooth sound from the leaves whispering in the cotton wood trees nearby calmed me down for a moment to reflect from my dream and to presently gather my good senses.

The water of a nearby pond sent a prism of star light through the trees and my eyes gathered the reflected light against the darkness that could not contain it. I pilfered some dried logs and short sticks from a place that was not too long ago a bog and they broke with a loud crack before being dumped into the sunken terrain I’d discovered to use for a fire pit. Some wooden stick matches I’d kept dry from the river water served to light the fire that burned away cinderling insects in flight. I figured my lone fire could be seen for miles away yet I was willing to bravely set next to it seeking the warmth from it with my hands none the less.

An hour or two passed as I had no way of knowing for sure with no moon in the sky to study. The surrounding darkness was like a jungle cage as sometimes creepy sounds would interrupt my serenity. Flickering eyes revealed a presence from within a darkened tree shadow following the hoot of an owl. The fire bugs energized the fresh foliage and the place had finally become lucid after disturbing its critter normality from my humanly presence and the overwhelming intrusion of a burning fire. I was finally beginning to relax again when something unexpected happened.

First there was a clamoring down by the river side, a man’s voice and then a response came from others. I suspected they might be traveling on downstream at first but wanted to find out more. I remembered the trail almost by heart because I had grown up in the wilderness of the west and retraced my earlier passage to the shore.

The river that fed downward from inland of the York- James Peninsula and finally released water to the sea was overflowing again and still rising while being pressurized further upstream by a thunder storm that I had spotted crawling through the northern skies just before dusk but there came much more than just water from behind me out of the Chesapeake Bay. I was totally shocked to see hundreds seemingly thousands of ships of all sorts converging upon the island’s bay. Steam poured from some of them that carried larger gun and cannon outfits while union soldiers peered over many ship bow’s while also yelling with navigational orders to the ships captain so that he may level out their gangplanks for the horses, mules, and

even then supplies of all kinds and other mechanisms of warfare.

I was a vagabond to them nothing more it seemed as I stood by watching the parade of men helping themselves to the nearby sandy shores belonging to the peninsula of hell. An hour quickly flew by as some stern steamers continued to float only farther up into the bay looking for Ft. Monroe to harbor. Shallow gullies and natural harbors were the choice for much smaller ships to drop their steel framed wooden plank gates finding empty coves and shallow troughs along the crowded water line. In a mere reflection from the waters beneath the boats hull I sometimes studied their crew members doing their jobs aboard ship. It seemed magical to me just to see it all that way .

A side door was intentionally left ajar by the workers of the furnace to fend off some of the heat coming from the shovel loads of coal that they had just fed into the hot burning ovens. Gravity being a relentless foe would soon turn back the trajectories of the burning ash cinders spoiling an escape for them from the towering exhaust stacks that were always blanketed with a pitch black layer of soot. Yet to my excitement many a frolicking sparkles that could escape farther from the earth flew from the mighty stacks and were set to frolicking by a warm breeze that forced them to rise aloft to hide within the black willow trees.

The Ladymack's first intention was to anchor nearby the shoreline while still in the bay, although last minute plans were made and full stern maneuvered the craft into a deep enough bayou that was nearby. Soon the soldiers threw out a long wooden plank that shot from the hull like an arrow released from it's bow until it plowed into the sandy beach. Surprisingly the first person out was an older man dressed well for working and he proudly stood at the top of the plank looking down and then finally towards me. He came forward until he reached the bottom just in time when one of the other soldiers yelled for Henry and he answered jubilantly as if something exciting was about to happen.

"Yes, dammit! What do you want." He replied as a valiant old semi retired soldier would do.

He was well educated in the art of fighting and had no fear of his fellow troops and it clearly seemed that he despised none of those present. I wondered why he was allowed to tag along with the Army Of The Potomac, because of his age. Though some of the soldiers had already begun using him to help unload the cannons that were now being pulled ashore.

He spoke of the Third Seminole Indian War and others that had happened before it while still working alongside of them. A half drowned soldier lost his blue cap into the water while tugging at the tow chain with the old gent.

"Pull harder and don't worry about that filthy hat. It needs a good washing anyway. Let the bay clean it," he said while straining his back to

move the heavy gun a little closer towards the shore. "Look there it is stuck in the wheel, keep pulling at it. The mules are already taken." His directions motivated the excited soldier even further until finally they had it pulled onto some moist sandy ground.

"Let the water drain down from it while you quickly go get us some oil and rags. This is no Quaker gun. It has to be dried up fast or it'll rust into muck, quick," he bellowed out as the young private responded by running up the plank heading towards a supply box buried down in the galley of the ship.

To my surprise he spoke to me. I was letting the tide cleanse my feet while watching the show.

"Hey! You over there. So what brings you to the Potomac son? Are you here to fight with us?" he proposed a second question to me. His demeanor seemed that of an understanding older gent, but I couldn't help thinking for awhile before trying to answer his line of questioning because I knew that I should.

"Well sir, I am a benevolent traveler from the back woods, and the wilderness of the west not a soldier. A recent flood unearthed an old wagon from a wealthy farmer's glen and set the old contraption to float for me, a miracle to say the least. Handfuls of good luck had spared my life and finally had brought me here to this place where I am luckily still alive and all in one piece. I spoke zestfully.

"What kind of work do you like doing or are good at, if I am not intruding," he asked in a mannerly fashion.

"I am a gold hunter! One that meanders along the many streams and river basins looking to inspect certain shiny objects that later on might yield a dollar or two at the local assayer's office or allow for the purchase of a warm blanket from the trader's scale. Chemical refining of the precious metals I do by trade. You see my father's education and training in chemistry allowed me to learn from his past and my wealth of unbridled curiosity set me to learning from early on about metallurgy and of the wonderful minerals yet hidden deep inside the Rocky Mountains, you know."

"Have you chosen to fight on a side of the war yet? I see that you are indeed old enough to carry a rifle," he observed.

Sir, it has been a shame of unmeasurable magnitude but I'm afraid that we were unable to receive much mail back home about this civil war and its recent news events. I am respectfully not up to date with its purpose. It all kind of perplexes me to some degree, even now. You see back home we fight with the Apache and other Indians. I haven't learned about it or have heard enough to make me want to join into it."

He seemed somewhat perplexed for a minute and I thought he might as well go ahead and frown but he didn't and then he said to me.

“Mmm... Son, I am an ornery old fool and a tired old man. The kind that follows along behind the young soldiers to help them prepare for the battle because they let me. Still seeking glory at my old age. I have been a soldier all of my life and a fool to some degree as well. Always being first in line for the fight has earned me a reputation and it follows me everywhere I go because of that unfortunate trait. These men that you see working against the sea to unload their machinery of war, they are no different in many ways and I believe that they are not so understanding as I am at this very moment. You must choose to be either friend or foe, you see. It is important that you do so quickly because your life will be in danger otherwise. It would be a good day to join with the Union and to become a soldier. You should talk to the captain pretty soon. Can you read and write?” he asked as part of his recruitment spiel he just offered to me.

Like a scholar I replied but wasn't exactly sure why I did or quite certain what was coming on next.

“My name is Henry by the way and what is yours?” he happily asked me as if I'd already just joined up with the Union army.

“Seth is my first name, Seth Allen from Sherwood Meadows,” I boldly stated as if he might know something of my home and its particular natural wonders.

“Sounds like some very good scenery to keep stored up there in your mind. Good thoughts can be a life saver because you never know when there might come a time when you need some pleasant ideas to steal from. Man, in this country good memories are more valuable than is gold. Well, I'll see you around. It's going to be days before we get everything planted on solid dirt,” he said while holding onto a smile and staring out at the mass confusion already beginning to arise from his absence out there. Suddenly his interest in the landing party was overwhelming and so he whisked himself away like the wind. I could not imagine a stealthier old man at the time he moved with so much ease like a younger man would.

The place was becoming crowded with machinery and had become an arena lit by oil lanterns and huge burning fires. Many soldiers were busy stomping around the place and soon my campsite area had become filled with metal boxes and the hardware to construct field tents. Soon after the invasion of my campsite I could see where all of this was leading. Firstly, I had no desire to become a soldier and before the sun came up I had slithered away into the night heading towards the north like a wounded snake delving into the enchanted jungle to avoid captivity. Secondly, there was something that I had to do.

I had made it for some time by traveling at night up the peninsula, avoiding the Union blue coats with careful acts of stealth and camouflage. It was not easily accomplished since they numbered in the hundreds of thousands yet they always gathered as an army and made camps with

smoldering fires.

Months flew by and I reckoned sometime in the month of May I'd managed to travel far enough away from the Chesapeake Bay to settle down nearby a settlement called The White House along the Pamunkey River.

It was cold for a morning in May and I considered that it might possibly rain again, and it did early on. Large plantations that were spread out for miles and miles following along the river began flooding from the water that came from the clouds. I could no longer hide in the wet foliage very well because the country side had begun to fill with the bodies of the troubled folks moving away from there to avoid conflict with the Yankees. The tempers of the displaced southerners had reached into the red zone so I kept my distance from all that I could and the rain made it somewhat possible.

I followed a slave trail along the shore line of the river until I discovered an old wooden loading dock being used for a side wheeled transit ferry. The sound of its paddle wheels slopping into the water near the other side of the river meant I might rest for a moment amongst the other migrants already filling the dock platform. A young southern belle and Indian native, perhaps in her early twenties, gathered a seat on the platform next to me. She carefully let her legs dangle above the flowing water to view her reflection next to mine. I looked in the depths of the water seeking out some rainbow trout that might be jetting for bugs in the shallow parts but I saw none. Though a channel catfish caught my eye while patrolling the bottom his dark silhouette filled inside a beam of light that struck the water from the over in the deeper portion. The southern Indian girl noticed it too and said something about it.

"My heavens, did anyone see that Blue Catfish down there? It could have taken my big toe off easily," she commented sarcastically.

"I saw it!" I replied energetically without thinking too much.

"Oh well, there's plenty more out there believe me. Say, are you from around these parts? You look different than us, your clothes are odd for this side of the Mississippi. Son, are you a westerner? I know you're not from the north or you wouldn't be here in this place right now, alive and intact, that is."

She was beautiful and curious and I liked her melodious voice and the way she asked me about myself. "You got it," I replied with no fear.

"You're a long way from the west. Do you know what is happening around you with these people and their lives?" She looked strangely at me while asking me the question.

"Yes, it's a shame," I told her and she understood that I meant every word.

"I shouldn't be leaving this place. It is my home. Grandfather forced me to go off of the reservation. You see I am a Pamunkey. Or at least partly. He was afraid for me because I am attractive especially to the young

soldiers from the north and he told my mother that I must go west. But where?" She gave me another look but this one was quite different than the earlier gesture while she spoke.

"Yes, but where? The west is big. Even bigger than the south. Towns are separated by many miles of vast wilderness. Much different than here and you must survive the heat, and the wind, and much more. Are you here to cross the Pamunkey using the fairy boat?" I inquired as it arrived and a plank was dropped onto the dock.

"Come on," she said. "Let us board the flatboat. He takes only donations because of the times. You know that a lot of people are penniless right now. If you have some money give him some of it. Otherwise do not worry about it. He won't care." She somehow knew that I had no money, but also it seemed that she didn't care and I was grateful for her mercy.

"Mule dung, darned weed eaters gonna fill my boat up with chewed grass," the impatient attendant yelled out while grabbing a shovel. Speaking to all of the crowd in such a way because there was no livestock boarding his boat at the time.

"I'm sorry, but what is your name?" I asked her while helping to load her two small bags, finally placing them along the bow of the ferry and stumbling on my own two feet.

"Pocahontas, but my friends call me Poe!" Her reply was friendly and sweet and she knew that I probably already liked her.

"Poe it shall be," I replied, saying little because I couldn't think of anything better to say, and then, "Poe! What kind of work do you like doing?" I asked her.

"Well, I am somewhat of an engineer. An inventor kind of person and responding to a telegram. I have an open invitation to meet someone at Richmond very soon. That person is a great aeronaut named Mathew, and he will be waiting for me there. He needs my assistance to help in designing a hydrogen generator for his fleet of army balloons. For the good of science I am heading that way. Then I'll go to the Pacific or beyond," she said and left me confounded.

"I would be willing to travel along if you don't mind the company. I have seen enough of the south for now. Maybe I'll return after the war and then people will be settled. I have no desire to enlist in either army, just to receive a private's pay. I am a fine chemist." I would say about anything to be with her, but it was true. I'd found a friend that I could trust but didn't let it be too obvious before her.

"Yeah! A chemist no doubt. That's good. But let it be known that I do not want any hanky panky or stuff like that. I am an intellect and seeking a new life. Do you understand, Seth?" she confided and gave me a very serious gesture.

"You bet! I'm not like that anyway. I believe in marriage and where I

come from women have dignity and are to be respected, always,” I said and no more was said concerning sex.

The ferry boat took us to the other side of the Pamunkey where we all quickly disembarked and the morning was proceeding on towards noon by then. Poe knew the countryside very well. She had grown up there and soon we found a well-traveled road to follow alongside many other southern escapees towards the Chickahominy somewhere north of Richmond.

Long hot days finally passed bringing our friendship even closer and Poe had proven her merit many times to me as being someone to be trusted even in hard instances. She had helped me develop a charade for myself, feigning absolute blindness. I carried a cane and struck those who would question my ability to see with it. The put-on lasted all the way to Gaines farm.

I could have died when I first laid eyes upon it and it was held down by many strong tethers, so large a thing it was and yet it floated up in the air. Mr. Lowe, Poe’s good friend, said it floated because it was lighter than the air and I marveled at the magnificent balloon and all of its wonders. I also wondered how such a thing could be held down even by such strength of ropes. Poe was ecstatic with watching it especially when it responded to a slight breeze or the warm thermal winds that would often come through the yard.

Mr. Lowe had been very hospitable to Poe and me and had offered us a place to stay there on the farm. We eagerly accepted. The road from Pamunkey to here had been long and treacherous, also very challenging for our bellies which oftentimes ached from hunger. I have to admit that mostly I was more interested in Poe than I was in hunting something down and our stomachs often would growl and interrupt something happening just to speak to us. There was a double bunk in the building with a wood stove for evening fires in the place and Poe had already prepared a meal with pork in the beans and corn meal bread baked in the fire out in the yard. She’d found a hinged and closed pan and it worked superbly for the bread making in the flame.

A long road that led inland from the Chickahominy river also sprouted other dirt roads towards the west and southerly towards Richmond. It had led us to this farm already weak and beaten by ruggedness of the times. The farm had the longest avenue I’d ever seen belonging to one single place. It was comfortably and picturesquely sunken into a dale that was surrounded by slow rising hills. They covered part of the morning’s landscape view with large fields lush with green grasses.

I was quite proud of Poe because she was there on a mission of science and I knew that she would stand up and fight for the invention constantly until she had won her prize. She spent a lot of time with the other aeronauts, particularly Lowe who was quite bent on creating a new method of

producing the hydrogen gas for his balloons and she was determined to help him do just that. Poe was already working with him on a drawing board, etching out her gypsum chalk in the form of long mathematical equations that made no sense to me. She was smart like no person that I'd ever met before.

People were milling around coming out of old tattered sheds and the like. Even the main house entertained people with certain things to do, all having to do something with the balloon. Even the telegraph was now part of it. Many of the calling were scientists from far away with an interest in the balloon. I was most shocked to find out that there were no soldiers lurking about to hold security at the farm, the kind of soldier that I had recently been avoiding so very carefully, but this was a civilian operation through and through.

A large shop with a concrete floor lay in the back yard where only Poe and a few others were allowed to go. They wanted no distractions and I couldn't blame them for that. The place smelled from boiling sulfuric acid to no end tainting a backwards wind towards the front yard horribly. I kept my distance in the front and let Poe handle the events in the back yard shop.

I approached Lowe and caught him standing at the helm of the balloon where he was busy tying up some loose ends with it.

"Hello! Can I help you with a chore, sir?" I asked him.

"Yeah. Hold this rope while I tighten a knot. It's coming loose," he instructed while sinking into the basket to draw hard against the lariat after forming a few ins and outs with it.

"Are you and Poe just friends or is there more?" he asked me very bravely for an answer.

"Hah!" I cracked up. I couldn't help but reveal some of Poe's law craft. I felt that a good laugh would better explain the way she'd always set the law down to me concerning that particular topic of romance and possibly sex. He didn't know Poe that well.

"You mean she is not taken up by a man? Oh, that can't be. I have never met such a brilliant woman in all of my life and she is of the most beautiful kind," Lowe confessed while turning his eyes away that I might discover more of his feelings for her.

"Yes, sir, I know. I tried to get romantic with her from the start back on the Pamunkey while riding on a ferry boat to cross the river, but she would have nothing of it at all. She quickly set my mind in the proper sphere you might say. Even out on the trail where it is absolutely dangerous I have seen some strangers get a fresh straightening out. Some soldiers out there wanted her to be a pleasure whore for their outfit, but it just didn't work that way either. Somewhere out there in the union army there is a soldier with a broken nose and some sore ribs, even though I suspect that he has probably healed from his wounds by now." I had revealed a private story to him

cover to cover so that I might hide my very own feelings. I wasn't sure just why I'd begun spouting secrets to him but suddenly I began to feel guilty for telling him too much of the truth.

"Good story and I believe you. Don't worry. I won't mention any of it to anyone!" he said and then continued talking with me about more things.

"You know, someday, Seth, I am going to take one of these contraptions all the way across the Atlantic Ocean if it doesn't kill me first trying. In this life all men, even a man such as yourself, have certain callings, beliefs that they know to be true, yet others may deny. And in my case I feel that most people do not understand the absolute value that can come from these cotton balloons flying up and into the air. Both civilian and military lives will benefit. You know that the great Union generals are now suddenly beginning to realize the extreme value that my surveillance service has to offer them. The tide has also turned for civilian uses and will continue to expand rapidly into who knows what. There will be no end to the potential benefits of aerial flight as it all grows and time passes on. Maybe someday mankind will make it into space or even walk upon the moon perhaps."

I listened to what he had said but also I was thinking that he was a unique kind person much like Poe except she was no speech giver like him. I still enjoyed his company just the same.

Time had passed while speaking in the yard with Mathew. I appreciated his amazing brilliance and also I was learning about ballooning and navigating one using the prevailing winds. It was time consuming.

Narrow shadows cast onto the ground slowly moved as the sun had finally reached a position high in the sky, closing in on a particular hour of the day commonly called noon. I kept my eyes peeled on a certain picnic table of interest simply because I did not want to miss out on the smallest portion of lunch. I had some catching up to do with my stomach.

Finally, but still on time, the front door of the large ranch house swung open and extended a catch spring to its fullest of length, and out from under a narrow threshold emerged an older black lady. First she looked out into the yard and then took a deep breath of fresh air while raising her arm high enough to grab onto a hanging cotton cord pertaining to the handle of a dinner bell and she began to ring it loudly so that everyone could hear. We all knew that she'd made a fine meal but mostly we knew that she wanted to be appreciated for her efforts in the kitchen which meant eating all of it down. I certainly had no problems appeasing her or at least trying to do so by filling my belly hatch, especially under a clear blue sky.

Pickled okra, catfish patties, corn bread, colored sugar water-- it was all there and getting cold. She even added on many more special delicacies and had each one spread out filling up some fine dishes. Lunch was now laid upon the picnic table for everyone to gather up. Lowe and the others

were much too busy to sit down and eat with us as science waits on no man. So each one of them grabbed a plate full of goodies and ate at it down while still on the run. As the noon hour passed the wonderful old black lady and I were the only ones left setting at the table. She didn't mind it and neither did I.

"Oh, what a beautiful day it is, Ma'am, even for ballooning but especially for eating good food," I said and was afraid that I had interrupted her working on something very special and delicious.

"Mmm, mmm," she cleared her throat for a second time and then we talked. "What are you doing here, son? I know that you are from the west maybe the Kansas territories and so does everyone else in this place. I can tell it by your western dialect and short speech. To the southerner you might as well be a northern Yankee or even worse a marriage lawyer or a politician. Don't you know that these are deadly boundaries for you to be staying inside of right now. Neither the Yanks or the Rebs are gonna like you very much and I mean every word it." She said it all so very bluntly that I might fully understand her exact intention, that I should be very careful with people and all. Let there be no mistake about it. But she had also spoken so honestly with me that I felt at ease with her and instantly took quite a shine to her.

Suddenly from the yard there was a sound that drew my attention and I had to look into that direction. It was Mathew and Poe test flying a balloon that had been filled from their new invention the hydrogen generator.

"Release the cables!" someone yelled, and they did. The two men on the ground were astounded when it tore away with a good wind and rose up into the air, both of them waving to the parties of scientists down below as it went higher and higher into the clouds above. It was amazing! When I saw Poe in the balloon she was smiling like I had never seen her before.

Mathew was too busy with the operation of the craft to smile or cheer at the crowd yet I was sure that he was ecstatic with it all. I wondered how they were going to turn back as I stood watching it disappear from sight, with no weights aboard. Later I ambled around wondering what I might do with my time as I stared at the weights for the balloon that had not been loaded aboard.

"They are not coming back are they?" I asked of the old woman who was also flabbergasted. She looked downward and responded with only silence. It was gruesome in the afternoon sun so I retired back to the little cabin and gathered my clothes. I was going to find them.

"You'd better wait!" yelled the old woman just as I was heading for the field that I had crossed when I first came to this place. "There was a rifle inside the basket of the balloon. I hid it there because Mathew would not have it inside of the house. I'm sure that he will find it and will shoot holes in the balloon." She somehow seemed relieved by saying that.

“Yeah, but even with holes it could be in free-flight for a very long time, even weeks,” I conjectured back to her.

“There was food and water at least...plenty of both. The thing was being prepared for a trans-Atlantic flight, you know. It just wasn’t completely finished with the weights and all.” She seemed bewildered and was beginning to turn pale after speaking the words and so was I.

“Goodbye, Ma’am. It’s been a pleasure to make your acquaintance,” I said as I tore out into the green pasture to find them. Touching my finger to the wind I figured they had traveled a mile westerly already and by night fall would be far away, no telling how far or what altitude for sure. Fearing the worst, it occurred to me that a balloon filled with lighter-than-air gases would certainly keep them rising up ever more to greater heights up into the open sky, until gravity found it once again, which could be very high, and at that altitude there could be very strong winds to say the least. I kept my eyes peeled, on the lookout for something in the sky, but only saw blue with traces of puffy white cloud matter everywhere.

I had decided to retrace my previous journey towards the Chickahominy river but to cut it short by heading west towards Richmond following along the many dirt roads occupied with disgruntled southern folk.

## 2

Thoughts of the war to end slavery and social injustice I thought was far behind me or at least I’d often hoped it was. Little did I know that there was also shamelessness in other realms and places. There are other worlds especially within the mind that never seem to get that far away.

It was getting cold and the month of November was beginning to carry a chill in the breezes more so in the evening right before sun down. I’d traveled for months on foot trying to provide as many miles between myself and the fighting as I could by simply heading west. I’d learned from the Voil boys who are extremely smart with natural things to intentionally keep the sunlight behind towards my back and in this case by doing so I had kept my tracks heading towards the territory of Kansas. I’d already worn out two pair of leather boots after leaving my first pair I’d worn from home now somewhere in the mud back in Virginia. Rather than stealing from the dead I chose to gather my new boots from the living soldiers while they kept sleeping away inside of their warm army tents. It was easy to stealthily maneuver through their campsites during the late night and to gather things up like left over food and half full canteens of water left outside near a dwindling campfires.

Now on the banks of the river four days walk from the head waters of the South Platte and over the high divide then I could set up for winter in the high mountain basin, perhaps finding good cover or even make a Teepee of my own. Only weeks ago and back south I had recently seen a photo of a teepee in a newspaper heading upstream tagged into the current while flowing away in the Mississippi river. I knew that I could build one of those things if I ever needed to do it. I just never had done so before. Now the South Platte river was flowing nicely even this late into the fall season and no real snow was on the ground yet, or in the river to clog things up with ice, but frozen ice could have been very easily been there. I knew that I should seriously start considering holing up somewhere. The time had almost come to call it a year but first I had to get somewhere special to a place where I wanted to be. I wanted to set roots way up high in the mountains and to live up there in the heights. Logically speaking the game hunting was the best, like no other. At the higher elevation I could hunt forever or until the end of my days at least.

Likely only four more days of walking uphill through the mountainous terrain and then I could be in the basin and finally once I were there hopefully there might still be time left before the first snowfall to possibly make a home shelter using some buffalo hides like I have always wanted to do. I needed a weapon and I had a good one. It was a bow and many arrows that lay in a dead Indian camp or abandoned there, it seemed as though they'd just left them for me to find. From the looks of the place I'd finally figured it was a small pox abandoned camp where I found them both. Even the blankets inside every teepee had remained untouched. I regretted having to go through their graveyard. I knew that I'd done something wrong but going there and the sight of it all was horrifying to me. Whom ever had to die so I could get that bow and batch of arrows I was deeply thankful to them. I think I even said it out loud a couple of times as I was getting out of the dead's area, quickly. I surely meant them no disrespect but to get where I needed to go, I had to do it.

I'd spent enough time reminiscing overly thinking while collecting some wood. Tonight I was going to have some warmth, scarce or not come hell or high water. Recently and from afar I suffered while hiding out but still watching other men enjoying the pleasantness of a campfire whilst I stayed cold but tonight was going to be different it was finally my precious night for some heat. I could hear some buffalo in the rough towards my western flank as they always grunted in a certain peculiar way. Just why they'd come into the trees, I wondered. This time of evening critters sometimes do odd things, behave abnormally that is. But why?

"Maybe they had come down for some water." I was close to the river I had to think, but still wondered that there could be more.

"Elk always move this time, late of day almost dark even. They often

preferred the fresh water of the flowing streams to the ponds sometimes.” I finally convinced myself.

In the gloomy darkness deep within the abyss of the trees I saw shadows silently moving and gracefully indeed, it was the elk’s whimsical herd. My flint created flame was just taking off now as a cool breeze exploded into it all by expanding itself into some dry grasses that I’d managed to find out on the tundra before the herds had eaten it all.

I still had some Hard Tack and many slices of buffalo jerky from the last raid I’d made on the soldiers camp. No need to kill anything tonight as I just wanted to rest my tired bones around a warm growing fire. I unrolled my once stolen bedroll and laid it out in a flat spot where I could be comfortable watching the fire or anything that I might like. Sometimes I enjoyed staring at the moon and studying it’s lunar features. Once I even thought I’d seen a smiling face on it but somehow I lost sight of it forever maybe.